

Laura!—oh, go away just now! I cannot bear it yet!—leave me!—leave me!”

If Laura had been turned into marble at the moment she could not have seemed more perfectly calm, for her mind was wound up to an almost supernatural effort, and, advancing to the place where he sat, without attempting to speak, she took Frank by the hand. Harry did the same; and not a sound was heard for some moments but the convulsive struggles of Frank himself, while he gasped for breath and vainly tried to speak, till at length he raised his head and fixed his eyes on Laura. Then, for the first time, was she struck with the dreadful conviction that this meeting was but a prelude to their immediate and final separation. The pale, ashy cheek, the hollow eye, the sharp and altered features, all told a tale of anguish such as she had never before conceived, and a cold tremor passed through her frame, as she stood amazed and bewildered with grief, while the past, the present, and the future seemed all one mighty heap of agony. Still she gazed steadily on Frank, and said nothing, conscious that the smallest indulgence of emotion would bring forth a torrent which nothing could control, and determined, unless her heart ceased to beat, that he should see nothing to increase his agitation.

At length, in a low, faint, broken voice, Frank was able to speak, and, looking with affectionate sympathy at Laura, he said, “Do not think, dear sister, that I always suffer as you see me now.

This joy has been too much for me. I shall soon feel easier.”

Major Graham observed a livid paleness come over Laura's countenance when she attempted to answer, and, seeing it was impossible to sustain the trial a moment longer, he made a pretext to hurry her away. Harry instantly followed, and, rushing into a vacant room, he threw himself down in an agony of grief, and wept convulsively till the very bed shook beneath him. Hours passed on, and Major Graham left them to exhaust their grief in weeping together; but every moment seemed only to increase their agitation as the conviction became more fearfully certain that Frank was indeed lost to them for ever. This, then, was the meeting they had so often and so joyously anticipated! Laura sank upon her knees beside Harry, and prayers were mingled with their tears, while they asked for consolation and tried to feel resigned. “Alas!” thought she solemnly, “how truly did grandmamma say, ‘If the sorrows of this world are called “light afflictions,” what must be those from which Christ died to save us!’ It is merciful that we are not forbid to weep; for, oh! who ever lost such a brother?—the kindest, the best of brothers!—dear, dear Frank!—can nothing be done? Uncle David,” added Laura, clinging to Major Graham when he entered the room, “oh! say something to us about Frank getting better,—do you think he will? May we have a hope?—one single hope to live upon, that Frank

may possibly be spared? Do not turn away—do not look so very sad—think how young Frank is,—and the doctors are so skilful—and—and—oh, Uncle David! he is dying. I see it! I must believe it!” continued she, wringing her hands with grief. “You cannot give us one word of hope, though the whole world would be nothing without him.”

“My dear—my very dear Laura, remember that consoling text in Holy Scripture, ‘Be still, and know that I am God.’ We have no idea what He can do in saving us from sorrow, or in comforting us when it comes; therefore let us seek peace from Him, and believe that all shall indeed be ordered well, even though our own hearts were to be broken with affliction. Frank has seen old nurse Crabtree, and is now in a refreshing sleep; therefore I wish you to take the opportunity of sitting in his room, and accustoming yourselves, if possible, to the sight of his altered appearance. He is sometimes very cheerful, and always patient; therefore we must keep up our own spirits, and try to assist him in bearing his sufferings, rather than increase them by showing what we feel ourselves. I was pleased with you both this morning—that meeting was no common effort; and now we must show our submission to the Divine will, difficult as that may be, by a deep heartfelt resignation to whatever He ordains.”

Harry and Laura still felt stupefied with grief, but they mechanically followed Major Graham

into Frank’s room, and sat down in a distant corner behind his chair, observing with awe and astonishment his pallid countenance, his emaciated hands, and his drooping figure, while scarcely yet able to believe that this was indeed their own beloved Frank. After they had remained immovably still for some time, though shedding many bitter tears, as they gazed on the wreck of one so very dear, he suddenly started awake, and glanced anxiously round the room; then with a look of deep disappointment, he said to Uncle David, in low, feeble accents,—

“It was only a dream. I have often dreamed the same thing, when far away at sea—that would have been too much happiness. I fancied Harry and Laura were here.”

“It was no dream, dear Frank; we are here,” said Laura, trying to speak in a quiet, subdued voice.

“My dear sister! then all is well; but pray sit always where I can see you. After wishing so long for our meeting, it appears nearly impossible that we are together at last.”

Frank became exhausted with speaking so much, but pointed to a seat near himself, where Harry and Laura sat down, after which he gazed at them long and earnestly, with a look of affectionate pleasure; while his smile, which had lost all its former cheerfulness, was now full of tenderness and sensibility. At length his countenance gradually changed, while large tears gathered in