

## HOLIDAY HOUSE

"No! nor am I now, dear Laura. What danger need a dying person fear? Yet, Laura, do you think I have forgotten old times? Oh, no!—not while I live. You attend to my feelings, and surely it is my duty to remember yours."

"Never mind me, Frank!" whispered Laura. "I have got over all that folly. When real fears and sorrows come, we care no more about those that were imaginary."

"True, my dear sister; and there is no courage or fortitude like that derived from faith in a superintending Providence. Though all creation reel, we may sleep in peace; for, to Christians, 'danger is safe, and tumult calm.'"

When Frank grew worse, he became often delirious. Yet, as in health he had been habitually cheerful, his mind generally wandered to agreeable subjects. He fancied himself walking on the bright meadows, and picking flowers by the river-side—talking to Peter Grey—meeting Lady Harriet, and even speaking to his father, as if Sir Edward had been present; while Harry and Laura listened, weeping and trembling to behold the wreck of such a mind and heart as his. One evening he seemed unusually well, and requested that his arm-chair might be wheeled to the open window, where he gazed with delight at the hills and meadows—the clouds and glittering water—the cattle standing in the stream—the boats reflected on its surface—and the roses fluttering at every casement.

"Those joyous little birds!—their song makes

## THE LAST BIRTHDAY

me cheerful," said he, in a tone of placid enjoyment. "I have been in countries where the birds never sing, and the leaves never fade; but they excited no sympathy or interest. Here we have notes of gladness both in sunshine and storm, teaching us a lesson of grateful contentment—while those drooping roses preach a sermon to me, for as easily might they recover freshness and bloom as myself. We shall both lie low before long in the dust, yet a spring shall come hereafter to revive even the 'ashes of the urn.' Then, Uncle David, we meet again—not as now, amidst sorrow and suffering, with death and separation before us, but blessed by the consciousness that our sins are forgiven—our trials all ended—and that our afflictions, which were but for a moment, have worked out for us a far more exceeding, even an eternal weight of glory."

Some hours afterwards the doctor entered. After receiving a cordial welcome from Frank, and feeling his pulse, he instantly examined his arms and neck, which were covered entirely over with small red spots, upon observing which the friendly physician suddenly changed countenance, and stole an alarmed glance at Major Graham.

"I feel easier and better to-day, doctor, than at any time since my illness," said Frank, looking earnestly in his face. "Do you think this eruption will do me good? Life has much that would be dear to me, while I have friends like these to live for. Can it be possible that I may yet recover?"

The doctor turned away, unable to reply, while Frank intensely watched his countenance, and then gazed at the pale, agitated face of Major Graham. Gradually the hope which had brightened in his cheek began to fade—the lustre of his eye became dim—his countenance settled into an expression of mournful resignation—and covering his face with his hands, he said, in a voice of deep emotion,—

“ I see how it is !—God’s will be done ! ”

The silence of death succeeded, while Frank laid his head on the pillow and closed his eyes. A few natural tears coursed each other slowly down his cheek ; but at length, an hour or two afterwards, being completely exhausted, he fell into a gentle sleep, from which the doctor considered it very doubtful if he would ever awaken, as the red spots indicated mortification, which must inevitably terminate his life before next day.

Laura retired to the window, making a strenuous effort to restrain her feelings, that she might be enabled to witness the last awful scene ; and fervently did she pray for such strength to sustain it with fortitude as might still render her of some use to her dying brother. Her pale countenance might almost have been mistaken for that of a corpse, but for the expression of living agony in her eye ; and she was sunk in deep, solemn thought, when her attention became suddenly roused by observing a carriage drive furiously up to the gate, while the horses were foaming and panting as they stopped. A tall gentleman, of exceedingly striking appearance,

sprung hurriedly out, walked rapidly towards the cottage door, and in another minute entered Frank’s room, with the animated look of one who expected to be gladly welcomed, and to occasion an agreeable surprise.

Harry and Laura shrank close to their uncle, when the stranger, now in evident agitation, gazed round the room with an air of painful astonishment, till Major Graham looked round, and instantly started up with an exclamation of amazement. “ Edward ! is it possible ! This is indeed a consolation ! you are still in time ! ”

“ In time ! ! ” exclaimed Sir Edward, grasping his brother’s hand, with vehement agitation. “ Do you mean to say that Frank is yet in danger ! ”

Major Graham mournfully shook his head, and undrawing the bed-curtains, he silently pointed to the sleeping countenance of Frank, which was as still as death, and already overspread by a ghastly paleness. Sir Edward then sank into a chair, and clenched his hands over his forehead with a look of unspeakable anguish, saying, in an undertone, “ Worn out as I am, in mind and body, I needed not this to destroy me ! Say at once, brother, is there any hope ? ”

“ None, my dear Edward ! None ! Even now he is insensible, and I fear with little prospect of ever becoming conscious again.”

At this moment Frank opened his eyes, which were dim and glassy, while it became evident that he had relapsed into a state of temporary delirium.