Falkner

Mary Shelley

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"there stood
In record of a sweet sad story,
An altar, and a temple bright,
Circled by steps, and o'er the gate
Was sculptured, 'To Fidelity!'"

—Shelley.

Part 1

Chapter 1

The opening scene of this tale took place in a little village on the southern coast of Cornwall. Treby (by that name we choose to designate a spot, whose true one, for several reasons, will not be given,) was, indeed, rather a hamlet than a village, although, being at the sea-side, there were two or three houses which, by dint of green paint and chintz curtains, pretended to give the accommodation of "Apartments Furnished" to the few bathers who, having heard of its cheapness, seclusion, and beauty, now and then resorted thither from the neighbouring towns.

This part of Cornwall shares much of the peculiar and exquisite beauty which every Englishman knows adorns "the sweet shire of Devon." The hedges near Treby, like those round Dawlish and Torquay, are redolent with a thousand flowers: the neighbouring fields are prankt with all the colours of Flora,—its soft air,—the picturesque bay in which it stood, as it were, enshrined,—its red cliffs, and verdure reaching to the very verge of the tide,—all breathe the same festive and genial atmosphere. The cottages give the same promise of comfort, and are adorned by nature with more luxurious loveliness than the villas of the rich in a less happy climate.

Treby was almost unknown; yet, whoever visited it might well prefer its sequestered beauties to many more renowned competitors. Situated in the depths of a little bay, it was sheltered on all sides by the cliffs. Just behind the hamlet the cliff made a break, forming a little ravine, in the depth of which ran a clear stream, on whose banks were spread the orchards of the villagers, whence they derived their chief wealth. Tangled bushes and luxuriant herbage diversified the cliffs, some of which were crowned by woods; and in "every nook and coign of 'vantage" were to be seen and scented the glory of that coast—its exhaustless store of flowers. The village was, as has been said, in the depth of a bay; towards the east the coast rounded off with a broad sweep, forming a varied line of bay and headland: to the west a little promontory shot out abruptly, and at once closed in the view. This point of land was the peculiarity of Treby. The cliff that gave it its picturesque appearance was not high, but was remarkable for being crowned by the village church, with its slender spire.

Long may it be before the village church-yard ceases to be in England a favoured spot—the home of rural and holy seclusion. At Treby it derived a new beauty, from its distance from the village, and the eminence on which it was placed, overlooking the wide ocean, the sands, the village itself, with its gardens, orchards, and gaily painted fields. From the church a straggling, steep, yet not impracticable path,

led down to the sands; by way of the beach; indeed, the distance from the village to the church was scarcely more than half a mile; but no vehicle could approach, except by the higher road, which, following the line of coast, measured nearly two miles. The edifice itself, picturesque in its rustic simplicity, seemed at the distance to be embosomed in a neighbouring grove. There was no house, nor even cottage, near. The contiguous church-yard contained about two acres; a light, white paling surrounded it on three sides; on the fourth was a high wall, clothed thickly with ivy: the trees of the near wood overhung both wall and paling, except on the side of the cliff: the waving of their branches, the murmur of the tide, and the occasional scream of sea-fowl, were all the sounds that disturbed, or rather harmonized with, the repose and solitude of the spot.

On Sunday, the inhabitants of several hamlets congregated here to attend divine service. Those of Treby usually approached by the beach, and the path of the cliff, the old and infirm only taking the longer, but more easy road. On every other day of the week, all was quiet, except when the hallowed precincts were visited by happy parents with a new-born babe, by bride and bridegroom hastening all gladly to enter on the joys and cares of life—or by the train of mourners who attended relation or friend to the last repose of the dead.

The poor are not sentimental—and, except on Sunday, after evening service, when a mother might linger for a few moments near the fresh grave of a lately lost child—or, loitering among the rustic tombs, some of the elder peasants told tales of the feats of the dead companions of their youth, a race unequalled, so they said, by the generation around them. Save on that day, none ever visited or wandered among the graves, with the one exception of a child, who had early learned to mourn, yet whose infantine mind could scarcely understand the extent of the cause she had for tears. A little girl, unnoticed and alone, was wont, each evening, to trip over the sands—to scale, with light steps, the cliff, which was of no gigantic height, and then, unlatching the low, white gate, of the church-yard, to repair to one corner, where the boughs of the near trees shadowed over two graves—two graves, of which one only was distinguished by a simple head-stone, to commemorate the name of him who mouldered beneath. This tomb was inscribed to the memory of Edwin Raby, but the neighbouring and less honoured grave claimed more of the child's attention—for her mother lay beneath the unrecorded turf.

Beside this grassy hillock she would sit and talk to herself, and play, till, warned home by the twilight, she knelt and said her little prayer, and, with a "Good night, mamma," took leave of a spot with which was associated the being whose caresses and love she called to mind, hoping that one day she might again enjoy them. Her appearance had much in it to invite remark, had there been any who cared to notice a poor little

orphan. Her dress, in some of its parts, betokened that she belonged to the better classes of society; but she had no stockings, and her little feet peeped from the holes of her well-worn shoes. Her straw bonnet was dyed dark with sun and sea spray, and its blue ribbon faded. The child herself would, in any other spot, have attracted more attention than the incongruities of her attire. There is an expression of face which we name angelic, from its purity, its tenderness, and, so to speak, plaintive serenity, which we oftener see in young children than in persons of a more advanced age. And such was hers: her hair, of a light golden brown, was parted over a brow, fair and open as day: her eyes, deep set and earnest, were full of thought and tenderness: her complexion was pure and stainless, except by the roses that glowed in her cheek, while each vein could be traced on her temples, and you could almost mark the flow of the violet-coloured blood beneath: her mouth was the very nest of love: her serious look was at once fond and imploring; but when she smiled, it was as if sunshine broke out at once, warm and unclouded: her figure had the plumpness of infancy; but her tiny hands and feet, and tapering waist, denoted the faultless perfection of her form. She was about six years old—a friendless orphan, cast, thus young, pennyless on a thorny, stony-hearted world.

Nearly two years previous, a gentleman, with his wife and little daughter, arrived at Treby, and took up his abode at one of the moderate priced lodging-houses before mentioned. The occasion of their visit was but too evident. The husband, Mr. Raby, was dying of a consumption. The family had migrated early in September, so to receive the full benefit of a mild winter in this favoured spot. It did not appear to those about him that he could live to see that winter. He was wasted to a shadow—the hectic in his cheek, the brightness of his eyes and the debility apparent in every movement, showed that disease was triumphing over the principles of life. Yet, contrary to every prognostic, he lived on from week to week, from month to month. Now he was said to be better—now worse—and thus a winter of extraordinary mildness was passed. But with the east winds of spring a great deterioration was visible. His invalid walks in the sun grew shorter, and then were exchanged for a few minutes passed sitting in his garden. Soon he was confined to his room—then to his bed. During the first week of a bleak, ungenial May, he died.

The extreme affection that subsisted between the pair rendered his widow an object of interest even to the villagers. They were both young, and she was beautiful; and more beautiful was their offspring—the little girl we have mentioned—who, watched over and attended on by her mother, attracted admiration as well as interest, by the peculiar style of her childish, yet perfect loveliness. Every one wondered what the bereaved lady would do; and she, poor soul, wondered herself, and would sit watching the gambols of her child in an attitude of unutterable

despondency, till the little girl, remarking the sadness of her mother, gave over playing to caress, and kiss her, and to bid her smile. At such a word the tears fell fast from the widow's eyes, and the frightened child joined her sobs and cries to hers.

Whatever might be the sorrows and difficulties of the unhappy lady, it was soon evident to all but herself, that her own life was a fragile tenure. She had attended on her husband with unwearied assiduity, and, added to bodily fatigue, was mental suffering; partly arising from anxiety and grief, and partly from the very virtues of the sufferer. He knew that he was dying, and tried to reconcile his wife to her anticipated loss. But his words, breathing the most passionate love and purest piety, seemed almost to call her also from the desolation to which he was leaving her, and to dissolve the ties that held her to earth. When he was gone, life possessed no one attraction except their child. Often while her father, with pathetic eloquence, tried to pour the balm of resignation, and hopes of eternal reunion, into his wife's heart, she had sat on her mother's knee, or on a little stool at her feet, and looked up, with her cherub face, a little perplexed, a little fearful, till, at some words of too plain and too dread an import, she sprung into her father's arms, and clinging to his neck, amidst tears and sobs, cried out, "You must not leave us, papa! you must stay—you shall not go away!"

Consumption, in all countries except our own, is considered a contagious disorder, and it too often proves such here. During her close attendance, Mrs. Raby had imbibed the seeds of the fatal malady, and grief, and a delicate texture of nerves, caused them to d'evelop with alarming rapidity. Every one perceived this except herself. She thought that her indisposition sprung from over-fatigue and grief, but that repose would soon restore her; and each day, as her flesh wasted and her blood flowed more rapidly, she said, "I shall be better to-morrow." There was no one at Treby to advise or assist her. She was not one of those who make friends and intimates of all who fall in their way. She was gentle, considerate, courteous—but her refined mind shrunk from displaying its deep wounds to the vulgar and unfeeling.

After her husband's death she had written several letters, which she carefully put into the post-office herself—going on purpose to the nearest post town, three miles distant. She had received one in answer, and it had the effect of increasing every fatal symptom, through the anguish and excessive agitation it excited. Sometimes she talked of leaving Treby, but she delayed till she should be better; which time, the villagers plainly saw, would never come, but they were not aware how awfully near the crisis really was.

One morning—her husband had now been dead about four months—she called up the woman of the house in which she lodged; there was a smile on her face, and a pink spot burnt brightly in either cheek, while her brow was ashy pale; there was something ghastly in the very

gladness her countenance expressed; yet she felt nothing of all this, but said, "The newspaper you lent me had good news in it, Mrs. Baker. It tells me that a dear friend of mine is arrived in England, whom I thought still on the Continent. I am going to write to her. Will you let your daughter take my little girl a walk while I write?"

Mrs. Baker consented. The child was equipped and sent out, while her mother sat down to write. In about an hour she came out of her parlour; Mrs. Baker saw her going towards the garden; she tottered as she walked, so the woman hastened to her. "Thank you," she said; "I feel strangely faint—I had much to say, and that letter had unhinged me—I must finish it to-morrow—now the air will restore me—I can scarcely breathe."

Mrs. Baker offered her arm. The sufferer walked faintly and feebly to a little bench, and, sitting down, supported herself by her companion. Her breath grew shorter; she murmured some words; Mrs. Baker bent down, but could catch only the name of her child, which was the last sound that hovered on the mother's lips. With one sigh her heart ceased to beat, and life quitted her exhausted frame. The poor woman screamed loudly for help, as she felt her press heavily against her; and then, sliding from her seat, sink lifeless on the ground.

Chapter 2

It was to Mrs. Baker's credit that she did not attempt to investigate the affairs of her hapless lodger till after the funeral. A purse, containing twelve guineas, which she found on her table, served, indeed, to satisfy her that she would be no immediate loser. However, as soon as the sod covered the gentle form of the unfortunate lady, she proceeded to examine her papers. The first that presented itself was the unfinished letter which Mrs. Raby was engaged in writing at the time of her death. This promised information, and Mrs. Baker read it with eagerness. It was as follows:—

"My dearest Friend,

"A newspaper has just informed me that you are returned to England, while I still believed you to be, I know not where, on the Continent. Dearest girl, it is long since I have written, for I have been too sad, too uncertain about your movements, and too unwilling to cloud your happiness, by forcing you to remember one so miserable. My beloved friend, my schoolfellow, my benefactress; you will grieve to hear of my misfortunes, and it is selfish in me, even now, to intrude upon you with the tale; but, under heaven, I have no hope, except in my generous, my warm-hearted Alithea. Perhaps you have already heard of my disaster, and are aware that death has robbed me of the happiness which, under your kind fosterage, I had acquired and enjoyed. He is dead who was my all in this world, and but for one tie I should bless the day when I might be permitted to rest for ever beside him.

"I often wonder, dear Alithea, at the heedlessness and want of foresight with which I entered life. Doomed, through poverty and my orphan state, to earn my bread as a governess, my entrance on that irksome task was only delayed by my visit to you: then under your dear roof I saw and was beloved by Edwin; and his entreaties, and your encouragement, permitted my trembling heart to dream of—to possess happiness. Timidity of character made me shrink from my career: diffidence never allowed me to suppose that any one would interest themselves enough in me to raise the poor trembler from the ground, to shelter and protect her; and this kind of despondency rendered Edwin's love a new, glorious, and divine joy. Yet, when I thought of his parents, I trembled—I could not bear to enter a family where I was to be regarded as an unwelcome intruder; yet Edwin was already an outcast—already father and brothers, every relation, had disowned him—and he, like I, was alone. And you, Alithea, how fondly, how sweetly did you encourage me—making that appear my duty which was the fulfilment of my wildest dreams of joy. Surely no being ever felt friendship as you have done—sympathizing even in the untold secrets of a timid heart—

enjoying the happiness that you conferred with an ardour few can feel, even for themselves. Your transports of delight when you saw me, through your means, blest, touched me with a gratitude that can never die. And do I show this by asking now for your pity, and saddening you by my grief? Pardon me, sweet friend, and do not wonder that this thought has long delayed my letter.

"We were happy—poor, but content. Poverty was no evil to me, and Edwin supported every privation as if he had never been accustomed to luxury. The spirit that had caused him to shake off the shackles his bigoted family threw over him, animated him to exertions beyond his strength. He had chosen for himself—he wished to prove that his choice was good. I do not allude to our marriage, but to his desertion of the family religion, and determination to follow a career not permitted by the policy of his relations to any younger son. He was called to the bar—he toiled incessantly—he was ambitious, and his talents gave every promise of success. He is gone—gone for ever! I have lost the noblest, wisest friend that ever breathed, the most devoted lover, and truest husband that ever blessed woman!

"I write incoherently. You know what our life in London was—obscure but happy—the scanty pittance allowed him seemed to me amply to suffice for all our wants; I only then knew of the wants of youth and health, which were love and sympathy. I had all this, crowning to the brim my cup of life—the birth of our sweet child filled it to overflowing. Our dingy lodgings, near the courts of law, were a palace to me; I should have despised myself heartily could I have desired any thing beyond what I possessed. I never did—nor did I fear its loss. I was grateful to Heaven, and thus, I fancied, that I paid the debt of my unmeasured prosperity.

"Can I say what I felt when I marked Edwin's restless nights, flushed cheek, and the cough that would not go away? these things I dare not dwell upon—my tears overflow—my heart beats to bursting—the fatal truth was at last declared; the fatal word, consumption, spoken: change of air was all the hope held out—we came here; the church-yard near holds now all earthly that remains of him—would that my dust were mingling with his!

"Yet I have a child, my Alithea; and you, who are incomparable as a mother, will feel that I ought not to grieve so bitterly while this dear angel remains to me. I know, indeed, that without her, life would at once suspend all its functions; why, then, is it, that while she is with me I am not stronger, more heroic? for, to keep her with me, I must leave the indolence of my present life—I must earn the bread of both. I should not repine at this—I shall not, when I am better; but I am very ill and weak; and though each day I rise, resolving to exert myself, before the morning has past away I lie down exhausted, trembling, and faint.

"When I lost Edwin, I wrote to Mr. Raby, acquainting him with the sad intelligence, and asking for a maintenance for myself and my child. The family solicitor answered my letter. Edwin's conduct had, I was told, estranged his family from him; and they could only regard me as one encouraging his disobedience and apostacy. I had no claim on them. If my child were sent to them, and I would promise to abstain from all intercourse with her, she should be brought up with her cousins, and treated in all respects like one of the family. I answered this letter hastily and proudly. I declined their barbarous offer, and haughtily, and in few words, relinquished every claim on their bounty, declaring my intention to support and bring up my child myself. This was foolishly done, I fear; but I cannot regret it even now.

"I cannot regret the impulse that made me disdain these unnatural and cruel relatives, or that led me to take my poor orphan to my heart with pride, as being all my own. What had they done to merit such a treasure? How did they show themselves capable of replacing a fond and anxious mother? How many blooming girls have they sacrificed to their peculiar views! With what careless eyes they regard the sweetest emotions of nature!—never shall my adored girl be made the victim of that loveless race. Do you remember our sweet child? She was lovely from her birth; and surely, if ever angel assumed an earthly vesture, it took a form like my darling: her loveliness expresses only the beauty of her disposition; so young, yet so full of sensibility; her temper is without a flaw, and her intelligence transcends her age. You will not laugh at me for my maternal enthusiasm, nor will you wonder at it; her endearing caresses, her cherub smiles, the silver accents of her infantine voice, fill me with trembling rapture. Is she not too good for this bad world? I fear it, I fear to lose her; I fear to die and to leave her; yet if I should, will you not cherish, will you not be a mother to her? I may be presumptuous; but if I were to die, even now, I should die in the belief that I left my child another mother in you—".

The letter broke off here, and these were the last words of the unfortunate writer. It contained a sad, but too common story of the hardheartedness of the wealthy, and the misery endured by the children of the high-born. Blood is not water, it is said, but gold with them is dearer far than the ties of nature; to keep and augment their possessions being the aim and end of their lives, the existence, and, more especially, the happiness of their children, appears to them a consideration at once trivial and impertinent, when it would compete with family views and family greatness. To this common and iniquitous feeling these luckless beings were sacrificed; they had endured the worst, and could be injured no more; but their orphan child was a living victim, less thought of than the progeny of the meanest animal which might serve to augment their possessions.

Mrs. Baker felt some complacency on reading this letter; with the common English respect for wealth and rank, she was glad to find that her humble roof had sheltered a man who was the son—she did not exactly know of whom, but of somebody, who had younger sons and elder sons, and possessed, through wealth, the power of behaving frightfully ill to a vast number of persons. There was a grandeur and dignity in the very idea; but the good woman felt less satisfaction as she proceeded in her operations—no other letter or paper appeared to inform or to direct. Every letter had been destroyed, and the young pair had brought no papers or documents with them. She could not guess to whom the unfinished letter she held was addressed, all was darkness and ignorance. She was aghast—there was none to whom to apply—none to whom to send the orphan. In a more busy part of the world, an advertisement in the newspapers would have presented itself as a resource; but Treby was too much cut off from the rest of the world, for its inhabitants to conceive so daring an idea; and Mrs. Baker, repining much at the burthen fallen upon her, and fearful of the future, could imagine no means by which to discover the relations of the little orphan; and her only notion was to wait, in hopes that some among them would at last make inquiries concerning her.

Nearly a year had passed away, and no one had appeared. The unfortunate lady's purse was soon emptied—and her watch, with one or two trinkets of slight value, disposed of. The child was of small cost, but still her sordid protectress harped perpetually on her ill luck:—she had a family of her own, and plenty of mouths to feed. Missy was but little, but she would get bigger—though for that matter it was worse now, as she wanted more taking care of—besides, she was getting quite a disgrace—her bonnet was so shabby, and her shoes worn out—and how could she afford to buy others for one who was not a bit of her flesh and blood, to the evident hurt of her own children? It was bad enough now, but, by and by, she saw nothing but the parish; though Missy was born for better than that, and her poor mamma would turn in her grave at the name of such a thing. For her part she was to blame, she feared, and too generous—but she would wait yet a little longer before it came to that—for who could tell—and here Mrs. Baker's prudence dammed up the stream of her eloquence—to no living ear did she dare trust her dream of the coach and six that might one day come for her little charge—and the remuneration and presents that would be heaped upon her;—she actually saved the child's best frock, though she had quite outgrown it, that on such a day her appearance might do her honour. But this was a secret—she hid these vague but splendid images deep in her heart, lest some neighbour might be seized with a noble emulation—and through some artifice share in her dreamy gains. It was these anticipations that prevented Mrs. Baker from taking any decisive step injurious to her charge—but they did not shed any rosy hues over her diurnal

complaints—they grew more peevish and frequent, as time passed away, and her visions attained no realization.

The little orphan grew meanwhile as a garden rose, that accident has thrown amidst briers and weeds—blooming with alien beauty, and unfolding its soft petals—and shedding its ambrosial odour beneath the airs of heaven, unharmed by its strange position. Lovely as a day of paradise, which by some strange chance visits this nether world to gladden every heart, she charmed even her selfish protectress, and, despite her shabby attire, her cherub smiles—the free and noble steps which her tiny feet could take even now, and the music of her voice, rendered her the object of respect and admiration, as well as love, to the whole village.

The loss of her father had acquainted the poor child with death. Her mother had explained the awful mystery as well as she could to her infantine intellects, and, indulging in her own womanish and tender fancies, had often spoken of the dead as hovering over and watching around his loved ones, even in the new state of existence to which he had been called. Yet she wept as she spoke: "He is happy," she exclaimed, "but he is not here! Why did he leave us? Ah, why desert those who loved him so well, who need him so dearly. How forlorn and cast away are we without him!"

These scenes made a deep impression upon the sensitive child—and when her mother died too, and was carried away and placed in the cold earth, beside her husband, the orphan would sit for hours by the graves, now fancying that her mother must soon return, now exclaiming, "Why are you gone away? Come, dear mamma, come back—come quickly!" Young as she was, it was no wonder that such thoughts were familiar to her. The minds of children are often as intelligent as those of persons of maturer age—and differ only by containing fewer ideas—but these had so often been presented to her—and she so fixed her little heart on the idea that her mother was watching over her, that at last it became a part of her religion to visit, every evening, the two graves, and saying her prayers near them, to believe that her mother's spirit, which was obscurely associated with her mortal remains reposing below, listened to and blest her on that spot.

At other times, neglected as she was, and left to wander at will, she conned her lesson, as she had been accustomed at her mother's feet, beside her grave. She took her picture-books there—and even her playthings. The villagers were affected by her childish notion of being "with mamma;" and Missy became something of an angel in their eyes, so that no one interfered with her visits, or tried to explain away her fancies. She was the nursling of love and nature: but the human hearts which could have felt the greatest tenderness for her, beat no longer, and had become clods of the soil,—

Borne round in earth's diurnal course

With rocks, and stones, and trees.

There was no knee on which she could playfully climb—no neck round which she could fondly hang—no parent's cheek on which to print her happy kisses—these two graves were all of relationship she knew upon the earth—and she would kiss the ground and the flowers, not one of which she plucked—as she sat embracing the sod. "Mamma" was everywhere around. "Mamma" was there beneath, and still she could love and feel herself beloved.

At other times she played gaily with her young companions in the village—and sometimes she fancied that she loved some one among them—she made them presents of books and toys, the relics of happier days; for the desire to benefit, which springs up so naturally in a loving heart, was strong within her, even in that early age. But she never took any one with her in her church-yard visits—she needed none while she was with mamma. Once indeed a favourite kitten was carried to the sacred spot, and the little animal played amidst the grass and flowers, and the child joined in its frolics—her solitary gay laugh might be heard among the tombs—she did not think it solitary; mamma was there to smile on her, as she sported with her tiny favourite.

Chapter 3

Towards the end of a hot, calm day of June, a stranger arrived at Treby. The variations of calm and wind are always remarkable at the sea-side, and are more particularly to be noticed on this occasion; since it was the stillness of the elements that caused the arrival of the stranger. During the whole day several vessels had been observed in the offing, lying to for a wind, or making small way under press of sail. As evening came on, the water beyond the bay lay calmer than ever; but a slight breeze blew from shore, and these vessels, principally colliers, bore down close under it, endeavouring by short tacks to procure a long one, and at last to gain sea-room to make the eastern headland of the bay. The fishermen on shore watched the manoeuvres of the different craft; and even interchanged shouts with the sailors, as they lay lazily on the beach. At length they were put in motion by a hail for a boat from a small merchantman—the call was obeyed—the boat neared the vessel—a gentleman descended into it—his portmanteau was handed after him—a few strokes of the oar drove the boat on the beach, and the stranger leapt out upon the sands.

The new comer gave a brief order, directing his slight luggage to be carried to the best inn, and, paying the boatmen liberally, strolled away to a more solitary part of the beach. "A gentleman," all the spectators decided him to be—and such a designation served for a full description of the new arrival to the villagers of Treby. But it were better to say a few words to draw him from among a vast multitude who might be similarly named, and to bestow individuality on the person in question. It would be best so to present his appearance and manner to the "mind's eye" of the reader, that if any met him by chance, he might exclaim, "That is the man!" Yet there is no task more difficult, than to convey to another, by mere words, an image, however distinctly it is impressed on our own minds. The individual expression, and peculiar traits, which cause a man to be recognized among ten thousand of his fellow men, by one who has known him, though so palpable to the eye, escape when we would find words whereby to delineate them.

There was something in the stranger that at once arrested attention—a freedom, and a command of manner—self-possession joined to energy. It might be difficult to guess his age, for his face had been exposed to the bronzing influence of a tropical climate, and the smoothness of youth was exchanged for the deeper lines of maturity, without anything being as yet taken from the vigour of the limbs, or the perfection of those portions of the frame and face, which so soon show marks of decay. He might have reached the verge of thirty, but he could not be older—and might be younger. His figure was active, sinewy and strong—upright as a

soldier (indeed a military air was diffused all over his person); he was tall, and, to a certain degree, handsome; his dark grey eyes were piercing as an eagle's, and his forehead high and expansive, though somewhat distorted by various lines that spoke more of passion than thought; yet his face was eminently intelligent; his mouth, rather too large in its proportions, yet grew into beauty when he smiled—indeed, the remarkable trait of his physiognomy was its great variation—restless, and even fierce, the expression was often that of passionate and unquiet thoughts; while at other times it was almost bland from the apparent smoothness and graceful undulation of the lines. It was singular, that when communing only with himself, storms appeared to shake his muscles, and disfigure the harmony of his countenance—and that when he addressed others, all was composed—full of meaning, and yet of repose. His complexion, naturally of an olive tint, had grown red and adust under the influence of climate—and often flushed from the inroads of vehement feeling. You could not doubt at the instant of seeing him, that many singular, perhaps tragical, incidents were attached to his history—but, conviction was enforced that he reversed the line of Shakspeare, and was less sinned against, than sinning—or, at least, that he had been the active machinator of his fate, not the passive recipient of disappointment and sorrow. When he believed himself to be unobserved, his face worked with a thousand contending emotions, fiery glances shot from his eyes—he appeared to wince from sudden anguish—to be transported by a rage that changed his beauty into utter deformity: was he spoken to, all these tokens vanished on the instant—dignified—calm, and even courteous, though cold, he would persuade those whom he addressed that he was one of themselves—and not a being transported by his own passions and actions into a sphere which every other human being would have trembled to approach. A superficial observer had pronounced him a good fellow, though a little too stately—a wise man had been pleased by the intelligence and information he displayed—the variety of his powers, and the ease with which he brought forward the stores of his intellect to enlighten any topic of discourse. An independent and a gallant spirit he surely had—what, then, had touched it with destruction—shaken it to ruin, and made him, while yet so young, abhorrent even to himself?

Such is an outline of the stranger of Treby; and his actions were in conformity with the incongruities of his appearance—outwardly unemployed and tranquil; inwardly torn by throes of the most tempestuous and agonizing feelings. After landing he had strolled away, and was soon out of sight; nor did he return till night, when he looked fatigued and depressed. For form's sake,—or for the sake of the bill at the inn,—he allowed food to be placed before him; but he neither ate nor drank—soon he hurried to the solitude of his chamber—not to bed—he paced the room for some hours; but as soon as all was still—when his

watch and the quiet stars told him that it was midnight, he left the house—he wandered down to the beach—he threw himself upon the sands—and then again he started up and strode along the verge of the tide—and then sitting down, covering his face with his hands, remained motionless: early dawn found him thus—but, on the first appearance of a fisherman, he left the neighbourhood of the village, nor returned till the afternoon—and now when food was placed before him, he ate like one half famished; but after the keen sensation of extreme hunger was satisfied, he left the table and retired to his own room.

Taking a case of pistols from his portmanteau, he examined the weapons with care, and, putting them in his pocket, walked out upon the sands. The sun was fast descending in the sky, and he looked, with varying glances, at it, and at the blue sea, which slumbered peacefully, giving forth scarcely any sound, as it receded from the shore. Now he seemed wistful—now impatient—now struck by bitterer pangs, that caused drops of agony to gather on his brow. He spoke no word; but these were the thoughts that hovered, though unexpressed, upon his lips: "Another day! Another sun! Oh, never, never more for me shall day or sun exist. Coward! Why fear to die! And do I fear? No! no! I fear nothing but this pain—this unutterable anguish—this image of fell despair! If I could feel secure that memory would cease when my brain lies scattered on the earth, I should again feel joy before I die. Yet that is false. While I live, and memory lives, and the knowledge of my crime still creeps through every particle of my frame, I have a hell around me, even to the last pulsation! For ever and for ever I see her, lost and dead at my feet—I the cause—the murderer! My death shall atone. And yet even in death the curse is on me—I cannot give back the breath of life to her sweet pale lips! O fool! O villain! Haste to the last act; linger no more, lest you grow mad, and fetters and stripes become your fitter punishment than the death you covet!"

"Yet,"—after a pause, his thoughts thus continued:—"not here, nor now: there must be darkness on the earth before the deed is done! Hasten and hide thyself, O sun! Thou wilt never be cursed by the sight of my living form again!"

Thus did the transport of passion embrace the universe in its grasp; and the very sunlight seemed to have a pulse responsive to his own. The bright orb sunk lower; and the little western promontory, with its crowning spire, was thrown into bold relief against the glowing sky. As if some new idea were awakened, the stranger proceeded along the sands, towards the extremity of the headland. A short time before, unobserved by him, the little orphan had tripped along, and, scaling the cliff, had seated herself, as usual, beside her mother's grave.

The stranger proceeded slowly, and with irregular steps. He was waiting till darkness should blind the eyes of day, which now appeared to gaze on him with intolerable scrutiny, and to read his very soul, that

sickened and writhed with its burthen of sin and sorrow. When out of the immediate neighbourhood of the village, he threw himself upon a fragment of rock, and—he could not be said to meditate—for that supposes some sort of voluntary action of the mind—while to him might be applied the figure of the poet, who represented himself as hunted by his own thoughts—pursued by memory, and torn to pieces, as Actæon by his own hounds. A troop of horrid recollections assailed his soul: there was no shelter, no escape! various passions, by turns, fastened themselves upon him—jealousy, disappointed love, rage, fear, and last and worst, remorse and despair. No bodily torture, invented by revengeful tyrant, could produce agony equal to that which he had worked out for his own mind. His better nature, and the powers of his intellect, served but to sharpen and strike deeper the pangs of unavailing regret. Fool! He had foreseen nothing of all this! He had fancied that he could bend the course of fate to his own will; and that to desire with energy was to insure success. And to what had the immutable resolve to accomplish his ends brought him? She was dead—the loveliest and best of created beings: torn from the affections and the pleasures of life! from her home, her child! He had seen her stretched dead at his feet: he had heaped the earth upon her clay-cold form;—and he the cause! he the murderer!

Stung to intolerable anguish by these ideas, he felt hastily for his pistols, and rising, pursued his way. Evening was closing in; yet he could distinguish the winding path of the cliff: he ascended, opened the little gate, and entered the church-yard. Oh! how he envied the dead!—the guiltless dead, who had closed their eyes on this mortal scene, surrounded by weeping friends, cheered by religious hope. All that imaged innocence and repose, appeared in his eyes so beautiful and desirable: and how could he, the criminal, hope to rest like one of these? A star or two came out in the heavens above, and the church spire seemed almost to reach them, as it pointed upwards. The dim, silent sea was spread beneath: the dead slept around: scarcely did the tall grass bend its head to the summer air. Soft, balmy peace possessed the scene. With what thrilling sensations of self-enjoyment and gratitude to the Creator, might the mind at ease drink in the tranquil loveliness of such an hour. The stranger felt every nerve wakened to fresh anguish. His brow contracted convulsively. "Shall I ever die!" he cried; "Will not the dead reject me!"

He looked round with the natural instinct that leads a human being, at the moment of dissolution, to withdraw into a cave or corner, where least to offend the eyes of the living by the loathsome form of death. The ivyed wall and paling, overhung by trees, formed a nook, whose shadow at that hour was becoming deep. He approached the spot; for a moment he stood looking afar: he knew not at what; and drew forth his pistol, cocked it, and, throwing himself on the grassy mound, raised the mouth

of the fatal instrument to his forehead. "Oh go away! go away from mamma!" were words that might have met his ear, but that every sense was absorbed. As he drew the trigger, his arm was pulled; the ball whizzed harmlessly by his ear: but the shock of the sound, the unconsciousness that he had been touched at that moment—the belief that the mortal wound was given, made him fall back; and, as he himself said afterwards, he fancied that he had uttered the scream he heard, which had, indeed, proceeded from other lips.

In a few seconds he recovered himself. Yet so had he worked up his mind to die; so impossible did it appear that his aim should fail him, that in those few seconds, the earth and all belonging to it had passed away—and his first exclamation, as he started up, was, "Where am I!" Something caught his gaze; a little white figure, which lay but a few paces distant, and two eyes that gleamed on him—the horrible thought darted into his head—had another instead of himself been the victim? and he exclaimed in agony, "Gracious God! who are you?—speak! What have I done!" Still more was he horror-struck when he saw that it was a little child who lay before him—he raised her—but her eyes had glared with terror, not death; she did not speak; but she was not wounded, and he endeavoured to comfort and re-assure her, till she, a little restored, began to cry bitterly, and he felt, thankfully, that her tears were a pledge that the worst consequences of her fright had passed away. He lifted her from the ground, while she, in the midst of her tears, tried to get him away from the grave he desecrated. The twilight scarcely showed her features; but her surpassing fairness—her lovely countenance and silken hair, so betokened a child of love and care, that he was the more surprised to find her alone, at that hour, in the solitary church-yard.

He soothed her gently, and asked, "How came you here? what could you be doing so late, so far from home?"

"I came to see mamma."

"To see mamma! Where? how? Your mother is not here."

"Yes, she is; mamma is there;" and she pointed with her little finger to the grave.

The stranger started up—there was something awful in this childish simplicity and affection: he tried to read the inscription on the stone near—he could just make out the name of Edwin Raby. "That is not your mother's grave," he said.

"No; papa is there—mamma is here, next to him."

The man, just bent on self-destruction, with a conscience burning him to the heart's core—all concentrated in the omnipotence of his own sensations—shuddered at the tale of dereliction and misery these words conveyed; he looked earnestly on the child, and was fascinated by her angel look; she spoke with a pretty seriousness, shaking her head, her

lips trembling—her large eyes shining in brimming tears. "My poor child," he said, "your name is Raby, then?"

"Mamma used to call me Baby," she replied; "they call me Missy at home—my name is Elizabeth."

"Well, dear Elizabeth, let me take you home; you cannot stay all night with mamma."

"O no; I was just going home, when you frightened me."

"You must forget that; I will buy you a doll to make it up again, and all sorts of toys;—see, here is a pretty thing for you!" and he took the chain of his watch, and threw it over her head; he wanted so to distract her attention, as to make her forget what had passed, and not to tell a shocking story when she got home.

"But," she said, looking up into his face, "you will not be so naughty again, and sit down where mamma is lying."

The stranger promised, and kissed her, and, taking her hand, they walked together to the village; she prattled as she went, and he sometimes listened to her stories of mamma, and answered, and sometimes thought with wonder that he still lived—that the ocean's tide still broke at his feet—and the stars still shone above; he felt angry and impatient at the delay, as if it betokened a failing of purpose. They walked along the sands, and stopped at last at Mrs. Baker's door. She was standing at it, and exclaimed, "Here you are, Missy, at last! What have you been doing with yourself? I declare I was quite frightened—it is long past your bed-time."

"You must not scold her," said the stranger; "I detained her. But why do you let her go out alone? it is not right."

"Lord, sir," she replied, "there is none hereabouts to do her a harm—and she would not thank me if I kept her from going to see her mamma, as she calls it. I have no one to spare to go with her; it's hard enough on me to keep her on charity, as I do. But,"—and her voice changed, as a thought flashed across her,—"I beg your pardon, sir, perhaps you come for Missy, and know all about her. I am sure I have done all I can; it's a long time since her mamma died; and, but for me, she must have gone to the parish. I hope you will judge that I have done my duty toward her."

"You mistake," said the stranger; "I know nothing of this young lady, nor of her parents, who, it would seem, are both dead. Of course she has other relations?"

"That she has, and rich ones too," replied Mrs. Baker, "if one could but find them out. It's hard upon me, who am a widow woman, with four children of my own, to have other people's upon me—very-hard, sir, as you must allow; and often I think that I cannot answer it to myself, taking the bread from my own children and grandchildren, to feed a stranger. But, to be sure, Missy has rich relations, and some day they will inquire for her; though come the tenth of next August, and it's a

year since her mother died, and no one has come to ask good or bad about her, or Missy."

"Her father died also in this village?" asked the stranger.

"True enough," said the woman; "both father and mother died in this very house, and lie up in the church-yard yonder. Come, Missy, don't cry; that's an old story now, and it's no use fretting."

The poor child, who had hitherto listened in simple ignorance, began to sob at this mention of her parents; and the stranger, shocked by the woman's unfeeling tone, said, "I should like to hear more of this sad story. Pray let the poor dear child be put to bed, and then if you will relate what you know of her parents, I dare say I can give you some advice, to enable you to discover her relations, and relieve you from the burthen of her maintenance."

"These are the first comfortable words I have heard a long time," said Mrs. Baker. "Come, Missy, Nancy shall put you to bed; it's far past your hour. Don't cry, dear; this kind gentleman will take you along with him, to a fine house, among grand folks, and all our troubles will be over. Be pleased, sir, to step into the parlour, and I will show you a letter of the lady, and tell you all I know. I dare say, if you are going to London, you will find out that Missy ought to be riding in her coach at this very moment."

This was a golden idea of Mrs. Baker, and, in truth, went a little beyond her anticipations; but she had got tired of her first dreams of greatness, and feared that, in sad truth, the little orphan's relations would entirely disown her; but it struck her that if she could persuade this strange gentleman that all she said was true, he might be induced to take the little girl with him, when he went away, and undertake the task of restoring her to her father's family, by which means she at least would be released from all further care on her account:—"Upon this hint she spake."

She related how Mr. and Mrs. Raby had arrived with their almost infant child—death already streaked the brow of the dying man; each day threatened to be his last; yet he lived on. His sufferings were great; and night and day his wife was at his side, waiting on him, watching each turn of his eye, each change of complexion, or of pulse. They were poor, and had only one servant, hired at the village soon after their arrival, when Mrs. Raby found herself unable to bestow adequate attention on both husband and child; yet she did so much as evidently to cause her to sink beneath her too great exertions. She was delicate and fragile in appearance; but she never owned to being fatigued, or relaxed in her attentions. Her voice was always attuned to cheerfulness, her eyes beaming with tenderness; she, doubtless, wept in secret; but when conversing with her husband, or playing with her child, a natural vivacity animated her, that looked like hope; indeed, it was certain that, in spite of every fatal symptom, she did not wholly despair. When her

husband declared himself better, and resumed for a day his task of instructor to his little girl, she believed that his disorder had taken a favourable turn, and would say, "O, Mrs. Baker, please God, he is really better; doctors are not infallible; he may live!" And as she spoke, her eyes swam in tears, while a smile lay like a sunbeam on her features. She did not sink till her husband died, and even then struggled, both with her grief and the wasting malady already at work within her, with a fortitude a mother only could practise; for all her exertions were for her dear child; and she could smile on her, a wintry smile—yet sweet as if warmed by seraphic faith and love. She lingered thus, hovering on the very limits of life and death; her heart warm and affectionate, and hoping, and full of fire to the end, for her child's sake, while she herself pined for the freedom of the grave, and to soar from the cares and sorrows of a sordid world, to the heaven already open to receive her. In homely phrase, Mrs. Baker dwelt upon this touching mixture of maternal tenderness and soft languor, that would not mourn for him she was so soon to join. The woman then described her sudden death, and placed the fragment of her last letter before her auditor.

Deeply interested, the stranger began to read, when suddenly he became ghastly pale, and, trembling all over, he asked, "To whom was this letter addressed?"

"Ah, sir," replied Mrs. Baker, "would that I could tell, and all my troubles would be over. Read on, sir, and you will see that Mrs. Raby feels sure that the lady would have been a mother to poor Missy; but who, or where she is, is past all my guessing."

The stranger strove to read on, but violent emotion, and the struggle to hide what he felt, hindered him from taking in the meaning of a single word. At length he told Mrs. Baker, that, with her leave, he would take the letter away, and read it at his leisure. He promised her his aid in discovering Miss Raby's relatives, and assured her that there would be small difficulty in so doing. He then retired, and Mrs. Baker exclaimed, "Please God, this will prove a good day's work."

A voice from the grave had spoken to the stranger. It was not the dead mother's voice—she, whatever her merits and sufferings had been, was to him an image of the mind only—he had never known her. But her benefactress, her hope and trust, who and where was she? Alithea! the warm-hearted friend—the incomparable mother! She to whom all hearts in distress turned, sure of relief—who went before the desires of the necessitous; whose generous and free spirit made her empress of all hearts; who, while she lived, spread, as does the sun, radiance and warmth around—her pulses were stilled; her powers cribbed up in the grave. She was nothing now; and he had reduced to this nothing the living frame of this glorious being.

The stranger read the letter again and again; again he writhed, as her name appeared, traced by her friend's delicate hand, and the concluding

hope seemed the acme of his despair. She would indeed have been a mother to the orphan—he remembered expressions that told him that she was making diligent inquiry for her friend, whose luckless fate had not reached her. Yes, it was his Alithea; he could not doubt. His? Fatal mistake—his she had never been; and the wild resolve to make her such, had ended in death and ruin.

The stranger had taken the letter to his inn—but any roof seemed to imprison and oppress him—again he sought relief in the open air, and wandered far along the sands, with the speed of a misery that strove to escape from itself. The whole night he spent thus—sometimes climbing the jagged cliffs, then descending to the beach, and throwing himself his length upon the sands. The tide ebbed and flowed—the roar of ocean filled the lone night with sound—the owl flapped down from its home in the rock, and hooted. Hour after hour passed,—and, driven by a thousand thoughts—tormented by the direst pangs of memory—still the stranger hurried along the winding shores. Morning found him many miles from Treby. He did not stop till the appearance of another village put a limit to solitude, and he returned upon his steps.

Those who could guess his crime, could alone divine the combat of life and death waging in his heart. He had, through accident and forgetfulness, left his pistols on the table of his chamber at the inn, or, in some of the wildest of the paroxysms of despair, they had ended all. To die, he fondly hoped, was to destroy memory and to defeat remorse; and yet there arose within his mind that feeling, mysterious and inexplicable to common reason, which generates a desire to expiate and to atone. Should he be the cause of good to the friendless orphan, bequeathed so vainly to his victim, would not that, in some sort, compensate for his crime? Would it not double it to have destroyed her, and also the good of which she would have been the author? The very finger of God pointed to this act, since the child's little hand had arrested his arm at the fatal moment when he believed that no interval of a second's duration intervened between him and the grave. Then to aid those dim religious misgivings, came the manly wish to protect the oppressed, and assist the helpless. The struggle was long and terrible. Now he made up his mind that it was cowardice to postpone his resolve—that to live was to stamp himself poltroon and traitor. And now again, he felt that the true cowardice was to die—to fly from the consequences of his actions, and the burthen of existence. He gazed upon the dim waste of waters, as if from its misty skirt some vision would arise to guide or to command. He cast his eyes upward to interrogate the silent stars—the roaring of the tide appeared to assume an inorganic voice, and to murmur hoarsely, "Live! miserable wretch! Dare you hope for the repose which your victim enjoys? Know that the guilty are unworthy to die—that is the reward of innocence!"

The cool air of morning chilled his brow; and the broad sun arose from the eastern sea, as, pale and haggard, he re-trod many a weary step towards Treby. He was faint and weary. He had resolved to live yet a little longer—till he had fulfilled some portion of his duty towards the lovely orphan. So resolving, he felt as if he paid a part of the penalty due. A soothing feeling, which resembled repentance, stole over his heart, already rewarding him. How swiftly and audibly does the inner voice of our nature speak, telling us when we do right. Besides, he believed that to live was to suffer; to live, therefore, was in him a virtue; and the exultation, the balmy intoxication which always follows our first attempt to execute a virtuous resolve, crept over him, and elevated his spirits, though body and soul were alike weary. Arriving at Treby, he sought his bed. He slept peacefully; and it was the first slumber he had enjoyed since he had torn himself from the spot where she lay, whom he had loved so truly, even to the death to which he had brought her.

Chapter 4

Two days after, the stranger and the orphan had departed for London. When it came to the point of decision, Mrs. Baker's conscience began to reproach her; and she doubted the propriety of intrusting her innocent charge to one totally unknown. But the stranger satisfied her doubts; he showed her papers betokening his name and station, as John Falkner, Captain in the Native Cavalry of the East India Company, and moreover possessed of such an independence as looked like wealth in the eyes of Mrs. Baker, and at once commanded her respect.

His own care was to collect every testimony and relic that might prove the identity of the little Elizabeth. Her unfortunate mother's unfinished letter—her Bible and prayer-book—in the first of which was recorded the birth of her child—and a seal, (which Mrs. Baker's prudence had saved, when her avarice caused her to sell the watch,) with Mr. Raby's coat of arms and crest engraved—a small desk, containing a few immaterial papers, and letters from strangers, addressed to Edwin Raby—such was Elizabeth's inheritance. In looking over the desk, Mr. Falkner found a little foreign almanac, embellished with prints, and fancifully bound—on the first page of which was written, in a woman's elegant hand, To dearest Isabella—from her A. R.

Had Falkner wanted proof as to the reality of his suspicions with regard to the friend of Mrs. Raby, here was conviction; he was about to press the dear hand-writing to his lips, when, feeling his own unworthiness, he shuddered through every limb, and thrusting the book into his bosom, he, by a strong effort, prevented every outward mark of the thrilling agony which the sight of his victim's writing occasioned. It gave, at the same time, fresh firmness to his resolve to do all that was requisite to restore the orphan daughter of her friend to her place in society. She was, as a bequest, left him by her whom he last saw pale and senseless at his feet—who had been the dream of his life from boyhood, and was now the phantom to haunt him with remorse to his latest hour. To replace the dead to the lovely child was impossible. He knew the incomparable virtues of her to whom her mother bequeathed her, while every thought that tended to recall her to his memory was armed with a double sting—regret at having lost—horror at the fate he had brought upon her.

By what strange, incalculable, and yet sure enchainment of events had he been brought to supply her place! She was dead—through his accursed machinations she no longer formed a portion of the breathing world—how marvellous that he, flying from memory and conscience, resolved to expiate his half involuntary guilt by his own death, should

have landed at Treby! Still more wondrous were the motives—hair-slight in appearance, yet on which so vast a weight of circumstance hung—that led him to the twilight church-yard, and had made Mrs. Raby's grave the scene of the projected tragedy—which had brought the orphan to guard that grave from pollution, caused her to stay his upraised hand, and gained for herself a protector by the very act.

Whoever has been the victim of a tragic event—whoever has experienced life and hope—the past and the future wrecked by one fatal catastrophe, must be at once dismayed and awestruck to trace the secret agency of a thousand foregone, disregarded, and trivial events, which all led to the deplored end, and served, as it were, as invisible meshes to envelop the victim in the fatal net. Had the meanest among these been turned aside, the progress of the destroying destiny had been stopped; but there is no voice to cry "Hold!" no prophesying eye to discern the unborn event—and the future inherits its whole portion of woe.

Awed by the mysteries that encompassed and directed his steps, which used no agency except the unseen, but not unfelt, power which surrounds us with motive, as with an atmosphere, Falkner yielded his hitherto unbending mind to control. He was satisfied to be led, and not to command; his impatient spirit wondered at this new docility, while yet he felt some slight self-satisfaction steal over him; and the prospect of being useful to the helpless little being who stood before him, weak in all except her irresistible claim to his aid, imparted such pleasure as he was surprised to feel.

Once again he visited the church-yard of Treby, accompanied by the orphan. She was loath to quit the spot—she could with difficulty consent to leave mamma. But Mrs. Baker had made free use of a grown-up person's much abused privilege of deceit, and told her lies in abundance; sometimes promising that she should soon return; sometimes assuring that she would find her mother alive and well at the grand place whither she was going: yet, despite the fallacious hopes, she cried and sobbed bitterly during her last visits to her parents' graves. Falkner tried to soothe her, saying, "We must leave papa and mamma, dearest; God has taken them from you; but I will be a new papa to you."

The child raised her head, which she had buried in his breast, and in infantine dialect and accent, said, "Will you be good to her, and love Baby, as papa did?"

"Yes, dearest child, I promise always to love you: will you love me, and call me your papa?"

"Papa, dear papa," she cried, clinging round his neck—"My new, good papa!" And then whispering in his ear, she softly, but seriously, added, "I can't have a new mamma—I won't have any but my own mamma."

"No, pretty one," said Falkner, with a sigh, "you will never have another mamma; she is gone who would have been a second mother, and you are wholly orphaned."

An hour after they were on the road to London, and, full of engrossing and torturing thoughts as Falkner was, still he was called out of himself and forced to admire the winning ways, the enchanting innocence, and loveliness of his little charge. We human beings are so unlike one to the other, that it is often difficult to make one person understand that there is any force in an impulse which is omnipotent with another. Children, to some, are mere animals, unendued with instinct, troublesome, and unsightly—with others they possess a charm that reaches to the heart's core, and stirs the purest and most generous portions of our nature. Falkner had always loved children. In the Indian wilds, which for many years he had inhabited, the sight of a young native mother, with her babe, had moved him to envious tears. The fair, fragile offspring of European women, with blooming faces and golden hair, had often attracted him to bestow kind offices on parents, whom otherwise he would have disregarded; the fiery passions of his own heart caused him to feel a soothing repose, while watching the innocent gambols of childhood, while his natural energy, which scarcely ever found sufficient scope for exercise, led him to delight in protecting the distressed. If the mere chance spectacle of infant helplessness was wont to excite his sympathy, this sentiment, by the natural workings of the human heart, became far more lively when so beautiful and perfect a creature as Elizabeth Raby was thrown upon his protection. No one could have regarded her unmoved; her silver-toned laugh went to the heart; her alternately serious or gay looks, each emanating from the spirit of love; her caresses, her little words of endearment; the soft pressure of her tiny hand and warm, rosy lips,—were all as charming as beauty, and the absence of guile, could make them. And he, the miserable man, was charmed, and pitied the mother who had been forced to desert so sweet a flower—leaving to the bleak elements a blossom which it had been paradise for her to have cherished and sheltered in her own bosom for ever.

At each moment Falkner became more enchanted with his companion. Sometimes they got out of the chaise to walk up a hill; then taking the child in his arms, he plucked flowers for her from the hedges, or she ran on before and gathered them for herself—now pulling ineffectually at some stubborn parasite—now pricking herself with briar, when his help was necessary to assist and make all well again. When again in the carriage she climbed on his knee and stuck the flowers in his hair "to make papa fine;" and as trifles affect the mind when rendered sensitive by suffering, so was he moved by her trying to remove the thorns of the wild roses before she decorated him with them; at other times she twisted them among her own ringlets, and laughed to see herself mirrored in the front glasses of the chaise. Sometimes her mood changed, and she prattled seriously about "mamma." Asked if he did not think that she was sorry at Baby's going so far—far away—or,

remembering the fanciful talk of her mother, when her father died, she asked, whether she were not following them through the air. As evening closed in, she looked out to see whether she could not perceive her; "I cannot hear her; she does not speak to me," she said; "perhaps she is a long way off, in that tiny star; but then she can see us—Are you there, mamma?"

Artlessness and beauty are more truly imaged on the canvass than in the written page. Were we to see the lovely orphan thus pictured (and Italian artists, and our own Reynolds, have painted such), with uplifted finger; her large earnest eyes looking inquiringly and tenderly for the shadowy form of her mother, as she might fancy it descending towards her from the little star her childish fancy singled out, a half smile on her lips, contrasted with the seriousness of her baby brow—if we could see such visibly presented on the canvass, the world would crowd round to admire. This pen but feebly traces the living grace of the little angel; but it was before Falkner; it stirred him to pity first, and then to deeper regret: he strained the child to his breast, thinking, "O, yes, I might have been a better and a happy man! False Alithea! why, through your inconstancy, are such joys buried for ever in your grave!"

A few minutes after and the little girl fell asleep, nestled in his arms. Her attitude had all the inartificial grace of childhood; her face hushed to repose, yet breathed of affection. Falkner turned his eyes from her to the starry sky. His heart swelled impatiently—his past life lay as a map unrolled before him. He had desired a peaceful happiness—the happiness of love. His fond aspirations had been snakes to destroy others, and to sting his own soul to torture. He writhed under the consciousness of the remorse and horror which were henceforth to track his path of life. Yet, even while he shuddered, he felt that a revolution was operating within himself—he no longer contemplated suicide. That which had so lately appeared a mark of courage, wore now the guise of cowardice. And yet, if he were to live, where and how should his life be passed? He recoiled from the solitude of the heart which had marked his early years—and yet he felt that he could never more link himself in love or friendship to any.

He looked upon the sleeping child, and began to conjecture whether he might not find in her the solace he needed. Should he not adopt her, mould her heart to affection, teach her to lean on him only, be all the world to her, while her gentleness and caresses would give life a charm —without which it were vain to attempt to endure existence?

He reflected what Elizabeth's probable fate would be if he restored her to her father's family. Personal experience had given him a horror for the forbidding; ostentatious kindness of distant relations. That hers resembled such as he had known, and were imperious and cold-hearted, their conduct not only to Mrs. Raby, but previously to a meritorious son, did not permit him to doubt. If he made the orphan over to them, their