

in hand down the steps, laughing and chatting together, anticipative of a pleasant drive, and that her ill-natured soul had devised the interruption, and calculated on its probable result. But if she had explained such a contemptible manoeuvre to Raymund, he would have laughed at the small suspicion, and been amazed that any heart could entertain it. Yet she knew it was a correct one; she winced under the injustice and wrong, too small and mean to complain of, and for once felt so hurt, that she was indifferent as to how Raymund judged between them.

On their return home they met John and Gloria walking in the avenue, Gloria in a cloud of white muslin and pink ribbons. She was making herself bewitchingly alluring, doing her utmost to remove the last barrier between the heart of John Preston and her own will; and Cassia, who knew him so well, perceived that he was resigning himself to her influence, though trying, even in the act, to justify the resignation to himself. She knew that he was saying to his conscience, "I love this woman, and I can do her good. I will make her mine, that I may eventually make her a nobler and better woman."

Raymund treated John very coldly; he knew that he could best punish Cassia through him; and she perceived, and was deeply wounded at so ungenerous a reprisal. John felt the stinted courtesy and left almost immediately, and Cassia went to her room to compose herself in its solitude. It was closed, and dusk and quiet. She turned the key swiftly, knelt down, and hiding her face in her hands, bowed herself almost to the floor, as she told God, in low sobbing words, her difficulties and her wrongs. Nay, she could not tell Him in particular; she only kept saying as she remembered them, "Thou knowest, Lord! Thou knowest, Lord!"

Suddenly a low, mocking laugh transfused itself through the palpable stillness of the room. She uncovered her face and rose to her feet. Madam stood by the window, and as Cassia moved she flung open the blinds. In the remnant of light her sneering face and shrivelled form, in its black and white garments, stood out clearly.

"A most edifying spectacle," she said.

"Madam, it is a shameful thing which you have done. What right had you in my room?"

"The right to do the duty you have neglected; the right to watch over my granddaughter when she is in improper company; and this was the best window for the purpose."

"She is with my brother."

"I know that—all the worse for her."

"John is too noble, too good——"

"John! John! John! It is John forever. I am sick of John! I wonder Ray endures it!"

She spoke so fiercely and with such gathering passion that