

door opened, and Mr. Hesketh entered the room, wrapped in a dressing-gown, with his white hair showing silverly under the purple velvet cap which Caroline had daintily made and embroidered for him. He was leaning on his servant's arm, and walked feebly. Caroline sprang up, and was at his side in an instant. Miss Kendal rose, wheeled the great chair closer to the fire, and placed the footstool ready. And when the old gentleman was seated comfortably, she took his outstretched hand in both of hers, with cordial kindness shining in every feature of her face.

"This makes our group complete," she declared, as she and Caroline re-seated themselves, one on each side of him; "we must have the chess board out, and Caroline must learn her lessons on the ottoman, and everything must be as it used to be."

But after she had spoken, and looked at the old man, her face changed: her eyes took a new expression, as they rested first on the old worn face, and then on the fresh, blooming aspect of the young girl beside him.

"He is so picturesque to behold," said Caroline, fondly stroking the soft folds of his brilliant robe, of Indian pattern and colouring; "he looks like a gentleman who has come down especially to do a lady honour."

"I am very glad to see Miss Kendal," said Mr. Hesketh.

And they began to talk of many things. He was principally a listener, for talking did not appear to be very easy to him, and he leaned back in his chair, as if rest was a luxury that he appreciated to the utmost.

It was not till Caroline, summoned from the room to see some poor pensioner from the village, had left them together, that Mr. Hesketh appeared to rouse himself from his thoughts, and at once broke in upon the subject that had been occupying them, apparently, at least, till then.

"Caroline has told you all our news. I suppose—of the engagement—of my losses?"

No; Caroline had forgotten all about the business details. Miss Kendal had heard of no losses.

"It was her own loss, poor child. Her money was principally invested in some mines, in which I also had embarked a considerable sum, which I intended for Caroline. There is the fatal mischief of not being a man of business," cried the old man, passionately, "why did they leave the child's fortune in my helpless hands? I understood nothing of these mines; I knew nothing of the chances and changes of such things. My old brains have failed me, I believe. All the shrewdness and clear sight I once possessed have no longer existence. I was bewildered—overwhelmed—struck down—when I heard the news. The whole affair was smashed a month ago. I had the news the day after her birth-day. My poor little girl!"

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