

"I'm—I'm to go to Mr. Blakeford—to his office, he says."

"Whee-ew!" whistled Mr. Rowle. "That's it, is it? Your gov'nor owed him money, eh, and he's going to take it out of you? I say, young un, you're in for it."

"Am I, sir?" I said, in a dull, despairing way, for I understood by his words that my future was not to be a very pleasant one, but just then I heard Mr. Blakeford's voice below, and Mr. Rowle gave me a friendly nod and turned away, while I stood listening, expecting to be called.

I can recall those feelings that came over me to this day—shame, mortification, wounded pride, misery, and despair. What was to become of me? How could I ever live with a man who spoke so cruelly of one who had always been so firm and yet so gentle with me? No mother, no father, no one to say one kind and encouraging word to me but that poor rough man in possession, towards whom in those hours of misery my young heart went out with all its passion of childlike affection.

I was half stunned. Had I been so idle and spoiled a boy? I did not know, only that I had been very happy—that every lesson had been a pleasure, and those summer-day entomological and botanical rambles with my father times of joy and delight. It was all a puzzle, too, about my father and Mr. Blakeford and their money matters, and of course I was too young to comprehend the legal instruments which empowered the solicitor to take possession of everything of which my father died possessed.

The entry of one of the porters made me creep hurriedly away, and going downstairs, I found room after room filling with the people coming to the sale, with the result that I crept into the garden and down the old laurel walk to the little summer-house at the bottom, where I shut myself in to lean my head against my arm and try to check the miserable tears that would come.

It was very weak and girlish, but I was only eleven, and during the past few days there had been so much to give me pain. I was heartily ashamed of my weakness, feeling all the time a kind of instinct that I ought to be more manly, and trying hard to become so, though now I can smile at the thought of the little, slight boy of eleven battling with his natural emotions, and striving to school them to his will.

It was very quiet and lonely down there, and in a few minutes I felt calmer and better, seating myself and wondering whether I ought not to go up and look for Mr. Blakeford, as I watched the robin—an old friend of mine—hopping about amongst the twigs.

Perhaps it was a foolish idea, but it seemed to me then as if that bird, as it gazed at me with its large round eyes, could feel for my sorrow, and I felt a kind of envy of the little thing's freedom from pain and care.

While I sat there thinking in my despondent way, the low