

The servant entered.

"Is Mr. Vaughan Hesketh in the house?"

"He has not long come in, miss. He is in his room."

"Beg that he will be so kind as to come down here—to me—immediately."

The door was closed. Silence again, for three long, long minutes. It was not more, before the quick step was heard treading the hall, and with a sort of determined haste, a clashing hold was taken of the latch.

Forth from the shadow advanced the man's figure. Tall and fairly proportioned was Vaughan Hesketh. He bore himself now with a mien which balanced between dashing boldness and deprecating, regretful depression. But his face had a smouldering flush, a disordered, excited look. Coward at heart, the utmost he could do was to keep up the show of manliness; and that was no easy matter, for all his six feet of height, and his imposing visage.

He came forward; Caroline met him. There was a flash in her eye which told how, at his presence, the tottering trust stood erect again. Doubt, suspicion fled, for the moment; she could almost see the flapping of their black wings. She sprang to Vaughan. They could see each other's faces, by the pale, weird gleam of the wintry twilight. She looked in his; then, involuntarily and all unconsciously, shrank back a little.

"Vaughan," she said, in a shrill whisper, as if something veiled the voice that would have otherwise burst into a shriek: "Miss Kendal is here. She has said—she has told me——"

She broke off. She sprang to him again, caught his hands, wrung them, and gazed into his face.

"You need only say it is *not* true," she went on. "Say it is *not* true!" she cried again.

"What is not true?" he asked, looking down at her sadly for an instant. But she took no notice of his question.

"Say it is *not* true!" she cried again. "It cannot be true; Vaughan, you know it cannot. Yesterday—only yesterday—you loved me better than the whole world. You told him so—our uncle. How dare she say, Vaughan—what she *has* said? Tell *her* how false it is; tell *her* what I know already."

He glanced at Miss Kendal, who stood immovably by the window. He did not look again at the girl's white face.

"It is our misfortune, Caroline——" he began.

The shriek burst forth then, and interrupted him. She let go his hands, and stood apart, gazing at him, though with eyes that seemed suddenly made soulless.