

the delicate child of luxury whom I have robbed. My darling, who, despite counsel of friend and guardian, insisted on placing her all in my hands; how have I fulfilled the trust? How venial now seem the acts of pettish waywardness that at times incensed me so deeply, beside the great wrong I have done her! Shall I write a few farewell words, and ask forgiveness?"

He drew the writing desk near him and wrote a few lines. Then a strange longing to look for the last time on her features stole over him. She would not be home for hours yet, and the portrait he desired to see hung in her dressing-room. He bent his steps thither. How calm, how home-like everything looked. A bright fire burned in the grate. Drawn up before the latter was Virginia's low easy chair, a handkerchief, yet redolent of her favourite perfume, lying on the back of it. Her dressing gown and tiny quilted satin slippers were on the sofa.

Above the mantel-piece, in the full light of the lamp, was the portrait he had come to see. He threw himself in the chair, first pressing his lips to the place where her head had so often rested, and studied the picture with eager eyes.

Busily memory retraced the past. His joy on that wedding day of which this was the mournful anniversary—their early wedded love—then the cloud that had come between them, growing denser day by day, till it had finally estranged, and almost separated them.

In that retrospect he took on himself the chief part of the blame. Yes, he thought more than once, he should have bowed his pride, and coaxed her out of her wayward moods, instead of intrenching himself as he had done in cold reserve. He should not have left her night after night alone without explaining the cause of his absence. Ah, if he were only allowed to live that year over again, how differently he would act! Then insensibly a dream stole over him of another sort of life, in which, though comparatively

poor, and struggling against adverse circumstances, they might yet be happy, living only for each other. Oh, how he would toil for her night and day.

Suddenly the falling of the glowing coals on which he had been dreamily gazing, recalled him with a start from that picture to the reality, and springing to his feet he whispered:

"If I wish to retain courage I must leave this spot at once."

He retraced his steps to the room he had left. Fireless, dark and dreary, he felt it was better suited to him than the pleasant chamber below.

He had taken up the pistol and was examining it, when again a noise fell on his ear, and the voice and footsteps of one of the servants sounded in the passage, close to his door. Would the household never retire to rest! For the first time he chafed at the easy domestic discipline of Weston Villa.

Crossing his arms on the table he bowed his head upon them, while horror seemed to settle as a pall around him. Thoughts that would not be driven away rose upon his memory, of that pleasant, far off homestead, with its old oaks and trim green lawns, in the English valley where he was born, and of the parents that slept the sleep of the just in the vault of the village church. Recollections too crowded upon him of the joys of boyhood, the dreams of youth, the noble purposes and hopes of manhood, and as he thought that all this was to end in a bankrupt suicide's grave, a groan burst from his lips.

There was a rustle near him, and looking up with a start, he beheld his wife in her festal dress at his side, more lovely too than he had ever seen her look, though her face was pale as marble, and her large eyes full of tears. Whilst he stared at her in silent bewilderment, her arm stole softly round his neck, and sinking on her knees she whispered: