

away and rushed to the window, gasping, with white lips, and bloodshot eyes, and a face of horror.

"He is dead!" he shrieked. "My boy—my son—my Johnnie! Murderer! You have killed him."

The landlord and the servants started back in horror from the presence of this father in his misery.

It was for but a moment that he stood there. He went back and flung himself upon the bed. Then he came forth again and stood upon the balcony, motionless, white-faced, speechless—his lips muttering inaudible words.

A crowd gathered round. The story soon spread. This was the father of a young man who had stopped at the inn and died suddenly. The crowd that gathered around the inn saw the father as he stood on the balcony.

The dwellers in the cottage that was almost opposite saw him, and Asgeelo brought them the news.

CHAPTER LVII.

MRS. COMPTON'S SECRET.

On the night after the arrival of John, Brandon had left Denton. He did not return till the following day. On arriving at the inn he saw an unusual spectacle—the old man on the balcony, the crowd of villagers around, the universal excitement.

On entering the inn he found some one who for some time had been waiting to see him. It was Philips. Philips had come early in the morning, and had been over to the cottage. He had learned all about the affair at the inn, and narrated it to Brandon, who listened with his usual calmness. He then gave him a letter from Frank, which Brandon read, and put in his pocket.

Then Philips told him the news which he had learned at the cottage about Langhetti. Langhetti and Despard were both there yet, the former very dangerously ill, the latter waiting for some friends. He also told about the affair on the road, the seizure of Clark, and his delivery into the hands of the authorities.

Brandon heard all this with the deepest interest. While the excitement at the inn was still at its height, he hurried off to the magistrate into whose hands Clark had been committed. After an interview with him he returned. He found the excitement unabated. He then went to the cottage close by the inn, where Beatrice had found a home, and Langhetti a refuge. Philips was with him.

On knocking at the door Asgeelo opened it. They entered the parlor, and in a short time Mrs. Compton appeared. Brandon's first inquiry was after Langhetti.

"He is about the same," said Mrs. Compton.

"Does the doctor hold out any hopes of his recovery?" asked Brandon, anxiously.

"Very little," said Mrs. Compton.

"Who nurses him?"

"Miss Potts and Mr. Despard."

"Are they both here?"

"Yes."

Brandon was silent.

"I will go and tell them that you are here," said Mrs. Compton.

Brandon made no reply, and Mrs. Compton, taking silence for assent, went to announce his arrival.

In a short time they appeared. Beatrice entered first. She was grave, and cold, and solemn; Despard was gloomy and stern. They both shook hands with Brandon in silence. Beatrice gave her hand without a word, lifelessly and coldly; Despard took his hand abstractedly.

Brandon looked earnestly at Beatrice as she stood there before him, calm, sad, passionless, almost repellent in her demeanor, and wondered what the cause might be of such a change.

Mrs. Compton stood apart at a little distance, near Philips, and looked on with a strange expression, half wistful, half timid.

There was a silence which at length became embarrassing. From the room where they were sitting the inn could plainly be seen, with the crowd outside. Beatrice's eyes were directed toward this. Despard said not a word. At another time he might have been strongly interested in this man, who on so many accounts was so closely connected with him; but now the power of some dominant and all-engrossing idea possessed him, and he seemed to take no notice of any thing—whatever either without the house or within.

After looking in silence at the inn for a long time Beatrice withdrew her gaze. Brandon regarded her with a fixed and earnest glance, as though he would read her inmost soul. She looked at him, and cast down her eyes.

"You abhor me!" said he, in a loud, thrilling voice.

She said nothing, but pointed toward the inn.

"You know all about that?"

Beatrice bowed her head silently.

"And you look upon me as guilty?"

She gazed at him, but said nothing. It was a cold, austere gaze, without one touch of softness.

"After all," said she, "he was my father. You had your vengeance to take, and you have taken it. You may now exult, but my heart bleeds."

Brandon started to his feet.

"As God lives," he cried, "I did not do that thing!"

Beatrice looked up mournfully and inquiringly.

"If it had been his base life which I sought," said Brandon, vehemently, "I might long ago have taken it. He was surrounded on all sides by my power. He could not escape. Officers of the law stood ready to do my bidding. Yet I allowed him to leave the Hall in safety. I might have taken his heart's-blood. I might have handed him over to the law. I did not."

"No," said Beatrice, in icy tones, "you did not; you sought a deeper vengeance. You cared not to take his life. It was sweeter to you to take his son's life and give him agony. Death would have been insufficient—anguish was what you wished."

"It is not for me to blame you," she continued, while Brandon looked at her without a word. "Who am I—a polluted one, of the accursed brood—who am I, to stand between you and him, or to blame you if you seek for vengeance? I am nothing. You have done kindnesses to me which I now wish were undone."