

this dear interview ended? Shall I not find you here on my return?"

"Perhaps you may; but perhaps, also, my mother will be with you. So you had better consider it at an end, lest you should be disappointed."

"If it is at an end, you must bid me farewell."

"Farewell," she echoes, smilingly, as she extends her hand.

"Is that the best way you know how to do it?" he demands, as he retains her hand between his own. "What a thorough English-woman you are, Irene; you would not relinquish one of the cold forms of society, even where your feelings are most interested. Custom first, and friendship afterward. Ah, you do not regard our compact in the sacred light that I do!"

He has drawn her closer to him as he speaks, and their faces are nearly on a level.

"O Eric! how little you know me!"

The liquid eyes upraised to his, the parted lips, the trembling hand—which he still holds—appeal to him until he loses sight of self and the bitter consequences of indulgence, and remembers only that they are man and woman, and they stand alone.

"Darling!" he whispers, as he bends down and kisses her.

By the crimson flush that mounts to her forehead, and the abrupt manner in which she disengages herself from him and turns away, so that he cannot see her face, he fears that he has seriously offended her.

"Forgive me! I know that it was wrong, but I could not help it. Irene, say that you are not angry!"

"Oh, pray go to mamma! she will think it so strange—she has been waiting for you all this time."

"I cannot go until you have said that you forgive me."

"I do forgive you then; but—but—it must never be again."

"Is that your heart speaking to mine, Irene? Well, I will not press you for an answer now; but grant me one favor—one token that you are not really angry with me: be here when I return."

And with these words he leaves her.

He finds Mrs. St. John restlessly pacing up and down the library, and appearing even more nervous than usual.

She is a frail, timid-looking woman, the very opposite of her high-spirited daughter; and, as

she turns at his approach, her very lips are trembling.

"How do you do, Mrs. St. John? I believe you wish to speak to me. A commission, of course. Well, I am quite at your service, from barley-sugar up to bank-notes. What a lovely morning we have had! I hope you are not much fatigued after last night's dissipation."

His frank and unrestrained address makes the task which she has set herself more difficult; but she takes a chair, and waves him to another, while she is vainly trying to find words in which to open the conversation naturally.

"I am quite well, thank you, Mr. Keir. Pray be seated. Yes, I asked to speak to you; it is rather a delicate business, and, had I not great faith in you, it would be a very painful one; but—are you sure that you are comfortable?"

"Quite so, thank you, Mrs. St. John," he answers, puzzled to imagine what possible connection his present comfort can have with the subject she is about to introduce.

"I am glad of it. It is much more satisfactory to enter on a discussion when both parties are perfectly at their ease. I asked to see you, Mr. Keir, because—I suppose you know that I am the sole guardian of my daughter?"

"I believe I have heard Miss St. John mention the fact."

"Yes, her poor father wished it, and, though I am very unfit for such a position, I knew he must be the best judge; and so—but, of course, it leaves me without counselors. Irene has no near relation but myself, and I have no male friends in England to whom I can apply for advice in any matters of difficulty."

"If I can be of any use," he interrupts, eagerly, "or could procure you the information you require, Mrs. St. John, you must know that it would give me the greatest pleasure to do so."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Keir—yes, you can help me—I am coming to that presently. But being, as I said before, the sole guardian of Irene's interests, you must perceive that it is my duty to be very careful of her—that I cannot be too careful—"

"Who could doubt it?" he answers, warmly.

"And you are very often in her company; you have been here a great deal lately, Mr. Keir—you are at our house almost every day."

"I beg your pardon."

"I say that you are very intimate with Irene—rather too intimate, I think; though, of course, we have always been pleased to see you; but the world will talk, and young people's