

"Will they? Then if anything happens, you must go to your Aunt Anne."

"Anything happens? Why what can happen?"

"Ruin!"

"What, uncle?" I exclaimed, with a start which nearly upset the little table before which I sat.

"Ruin, my dear," he answered, in the calm tones of despair. "I am ruined."

"Oh, no—no!" I cried, springing from my chair and seizing his hand, which burned like fire. "You must not say so."

"Others will, Lizzie."

"But why?"

"Because it is the truth. Three years ago I engaged in a mining speculation, which promised so fairly that many practical men, whose lives had been spent in studying the subject, embarked largely in it; and I following their example and advice, invested the whole of my capital. The project has failed, and we are all ruined."

"Does my aunt know?"

"No."

"But should you not tell her?"

"No, Lizzie," said my uncle, almost fiercely; "I will tell her no more. I will not be taunted with my folly."

"Oh, she will not taunt now; she will be too sorry for you."

Nonsense! People who are sorry, or really interested for others, don't scare their confidence away by telling them how much wiser they are. If your aunt, three years ago, when this matter was first proposed to me, had acted differently to what she did, all would have been different. I should have consulted her upon the subject, and in all human probability, she, being of a less sanguine disposition than myself, would have seen much that in my ardour I did not see, and have prevented my entrance into the business at all. But instead of encouraging, she always deters me from telling her anything, by raking up old grievances, and repeating over and over again, that she knew from the first how it would be. Failure itself is hard enough to bear, Lizzie, for no man undertakes a thing without believing that he will succeed; but to be taunted and jeered, as if his ill success were

the consequence of his own deliberate obstinacy or want of principle, is more than any human being can or will endure. No! all is over. I have been misled and foolish. I can see now many circumstances which ought to have struck me at first, and which would have arrested the attention of a less excitable person, and warned him, but which never occurred to me until too late. Regrets now, however, are useless: nothing can recall the past? and my only comfort is, that my wife will be provided for, let what will become of me."

"But is the matter quite hopeless, uncle? Are you quite sure that nothing can be done?"

"No, Lizzie, I am not sure. I believe that in my case something might be done, for I have not joined so entirely as others did; but I am so thoroughly depressed and subdued, that I dare not proceed upon my own responsibility,—I have lost confidence in myself, in my own judgment; and as I have no children to suffer for my folly, and my wife is provided for, I shall let things go their own way. I can get a situation in London which will keep me,"

"But if you will not trust yourself, uncle, will you not trust my aunt? She is a clever woman, and surely you should not give up without making an effort to redeem affairs."

"No; I ought not, perhaps; but I shall. It is cowardly, I dare say, but I can better face ruin than taunts. I deserve the one, but no man deserves the other."

And taking his hat from a little side-table he walked out.

I never saw him after. Late in the evening a note was brought to my aunt from a friend's house in the neighbourhood, saying, that her husband was spending a few days there, and requesting that his portmanteau might be furnished and sent to him.

By her desire I packed and despatched the necessary articles, and the next intelligence we had was, that poor Uncle Charles had gone to London, been arrested there, and was incarcerated in the King's Bench. Then came other law proceedings, a sale at Merrifield, investigation of my aunt's settlement, and sorrows of all kinds; until finally, after a year's strife and struggle,