LADY ...

... Lady Caraven ... "I am ... Let me ... Powerful of drawing the attention of everybody, she stood ... gazing again and again with a wild intensity that she would not see him. She refused all food, but she insisted on his going to get rest and at last Arley Ransome grew alarmed about her. He threatened to go to rest and at that threat she started up ... of mental was as bitter as death to him. It was with a feeling of intense relief that he saw Lord Caraven arrive.

"This is a terrible business," he said, "My daughter must have been driven to great extremes before she did this."

"It is all a foolish mistake," cried the Earl. "Where is she? I want to see her."

"A mistake!" said the lawyer, with dignity. "Most men would give your conduct another name, Lord Caraven. People should be careful before they make such mistakes."

They went together to Hildred's room. Arley Ransome spoke first.

"Hildred, I have something very particular to say to you—open the door."

There was not a sound, and Lord Caraven began to feel slightly alarmed.

"Hildred," said her father, "I have a message from your husband."

Still there was no sound, and, unable to control himself, the Earl cried out—

"Hildred, for Heaven's sake speak to me! Let me in—I want to see you!"

The sound of his voice seemed to have an electric effect upon her. The next moment she turned the key in the lock and opened wide the door.

With a cry of fear and surprise he started back—when he saw her. He had seen her lately as beautiful, as radiant—now her long black hair hung in disorder over her shoulders; her face was pale and stained with tears, her eyes were dim, her lips white. He hardly knew her.

"Hildred!" he cried.

She looked at him with dim and eyes.

"You!" she said. "Is it you who thought me guilty of murder?"

Lord Caraven turned to Arley Ransome.

"Leave me alone with her," he said. "I have much to say."

Mr. Ransome went away. The Earl entered the room and closed the door. He went to his wife, holding out both his hands.

"Will you forgive me?" he said. "I can never pardon myself.

But she shrank from him.

"You believed that I committed murder," she answered. "No, I cannot touch your hands."

"Hildred, listen. It was almost all your own fault; you said you were guilty."

"Not of murder," she rejoined. I could not have supposed that you would think me capable of that, much as you dislike me."

"I do not dislike you, Hildred," said the Earl, in a voice full of emotion; "and I am, indeed, grieved at having offended you. Do you refuse to pardon me."

"There can be no question, my lord, for the wrong you have done me," she replied.

And then she had to wait—to wait for her husband's pardon—it would be a work of patience and of time.

"I cannot believe," he said, "that you will be unkind or unjust to me, Hildred. I have suffered more than you have."

"That is not possible," she rejoined—"no one has accused you of a terrible crime."

"But I have suspected an innocent person," he said; and it is harder to inflict that than to bear pain."

"My pain would not displease or disconcert you," she replied.

There was something in her manner which half frightened him—she seemed as though her brain were dazed. She did not appear like herself. He began to wonder if suffering and suspense had really driven her mad.

"I am very sorry," she said, "that Blantyre made the mistake. I almost wish that he had shot me through the heart. What have I to live for?"

"I could not spare you, Hildred—you have been the good angel of my life!"

"You would be better without me. Your ties are free and unencumbered now—you have roused yourself to a sense of your duties—you know how to perform them. I am of no more use. I am sorry that John Blantyre missed his aim."

"That is not like you, Hildred. Where is your bright energy, your hope, your cheerful animation?"

She clasped her hands with a shudder.

"I am sick," she said—"sick with a terrible despair."

He was at a loss what to say to her—she seemed immovable. Suddenly her face flushed, and a bright light came into the eyes that had been so dim.

"You sent me from your house, Lord Caraven, and pronounced me guilty on what seems to me very slight evidence. I may claim to be at least as credulous as yourself, yet I declare had anyone accused you of murder I should not have believed it. You judged me guilty at once—guilty of trying to murder—I, who never in my life trampled even upon a worm. Why should you have thought that I wished Lady Hamilton dead?"

He looked slightly confused.

"You remember that you told me you were jealous of her?" he replied.

"Jealous," she repeated dearily. "Did I ever love you then? I have forgotten—my brain is dazed, dull. I seem to remember nothing clearly, except that you judged me guilty of murder. Did I love you?"

The wan face and dim eyes touched him inexpressibly.

"You have said so, Hildred. I hope you will say the same again," he answered.

"Never, if you thought me guilty of murder," she said, decisively. "My life has been a sore disappointment to me; it has been hard to bear; it has not had one gleam of light. But is all over now. Now that you have announced me of murder, I have no further interest in it."

She looked so hopeless and so dreary that he was deeply pained. It struck him, too, that she looked terribly ill.

"Hildred," he said, gently, "be merciful. I am much to blame; but you will surely pardon me."

He tried to touch her hands, but she drew them proudly away. She stood before him erect and defiant.

"I had my life given me to enjoy, as others had," she said. "I had the power of loving—the longing for happiness, as others have. What right had you to crush from me all that right had you, because you had money, to take my wealth, bearer of your name? What right has you to ten years of shame? What have I ever done to you? I am guilty ... I had tried to ... I had ... Why do you ... Make me ... Why ... Why ... Why