

"What sort of a person was this old Mr. Brabazon? He is dead, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir. Died soon after he left England; that will be thirty years come next Christmas. As you ask me—not that you often do the like, sir—I can tell you the old squire was a regular bad lot; not that I ought to say the like, having eaten his bread for many a year."

"Bad! How do you mean? Bad is such an elastic word, Mrs. Chilcomb," I said with a poor attempt—I knew it was a poor one—at a smile.

"No words, elastic as you says or not, could tell how bad. They said," she went on, bending her head towards me and sinking her voice into a whisper, "that he killed his poor wife; and some even went farther—"

"Farther!" I cried in amazement.

"Yes, sir, farther. I says it. He was in league with the devil himself, it is my own private belief."

I laughed at Mrs. Chilcomb's impressiveness as she delivered herself of this absurd charge against the late Mr. Brabazon; but I own, foolish as it may seem, her statement sent an uneasy shudder through my frame, and the influence of that strange yellow eye seemed for a while to reassert itself over my spirit. "I suppose you have often met the present Mr. Brabazon; when he was a boy, I mean?" I asked.

"Never once," replied my housekeeper with emphasis. "Neither I nor any one that I know ever laid eyes on the young squire."