

Caroline was insensibly soothed. The first natural gush of warm tears came to her—the first natural utterance of her misery escaped her.

"O, if he were here again! He was so good—he loved me so much. I could bear everything then."

And then, after a pause of passionate weeping, she broke again into unconnected sentences, involuntary wrested from her, as it seemed, of piteous, hopeless forlornness and desolation.

"Take comfort, my child," said the deep, tremulous voice of Miss Kendal; "you are not desolate; some love is left to you yet."

"I trusted Vaughan's love. Vaughan—Vaughan!" she cried, in a sudden paroxysm of desperation, as if the word once let loose defied her own power of restraint. "I believed in him, I looked to him for love, and help, and consolation—always. If he had died—if only he had died—so that I might have kept my love for him. It is so dreadful to think—to think that my Vaughan is nothing—worse than nothing! that he never lived—never! that I may not keep even his memory dear and sacred in my heart!"

She spoke as if to herself. It seemed a relief to vent in words the thoughts that had wrung her soul day by day. But a fuller consciousness soon followed. She looked hastily up into the face of her companion, and paused in her revelation. Even then, her calmer thought could not endure to impart the details, the proofs of his deliberate falsehood. She fell back, and was silent. But as she buried her face in her hands, many a cruel memory came to torture her with fresh corroboration of the long-planned scheme of deception, laid and practised by this man—the ideal of her girlhood, the hero of all the story of her life hitherto.

Aye, there was the sting that poisoned most festeringly the young, trusting nature—that had never yet known doubt, that had been fenced around with love, and care, and tenderness, during all the years it could remember. Miss Kendal was puzzled sometimes (not knowing how much the girl herself knew) that she at once penetrated to the sense of the complicated faithlessness of Vaughan Hesketh. She had apprehended that, in her woman's capacity for excusing faults and palliating offences where she loved, she would have absolved her betrothed, after awhile, from all intentional deception. But that possibility did not exist for Caroline. It had been a dear blessing to her at that time had it done so. But the unwarped sense of right in herself would have forbade all such paltering with the truth, even if her own instinctive feeling had not been beforehand with it. She had no mental cowardice in her. She could bear to understand, if she could bear to *feel*, that Vaughan had been treacherous and base; that he had used her love first as an instrument, then as a

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