

While these two young hearts comforted each other with assurances of true and steadfast love an interview of a very different description was passing between Cranston and his sorely-stricken wife. He had ascertained that Acland had not been to see her since they had met, and knowing the state of suspense in which she must be, he applied, through Mr. Cross, for a line of introduction to the doctor. This Acland sent at once. A short and partial explanation satisfied the doctor, and Cranston was left alone with the sufferer.

He stood by her for a moment in silence, while her eyes were fixed with dread and eagerness on his. Her fine fair hair was carefully arranged, but her cheeks were hollow, her lips bloodless, only the eyes looked alive, and they glowed with an intensity that deepened their colour and made the rest of her face more ghastly, her thin white hands lay helplessly on the coverlet. The picture of what she was five-and-twenty years ago, when he had passionately loved the woman he believed her to be, came back vividly to his memory. And all the misery of his awakening from the dream in which for a while he had been happy, even hate for her, had left him. He could only feel compassion, not untinged by contempt, for the wreck before him.

The silence was first broken by her exclaiming in a hoarse forceful whisper:

"Blake?"

"He has fled," returned Cranston. "He will never trouble you again."

"And—my husband?"

"He knows all, and is struck down with grief and despair."

"What about old Maynard?"

"He is dead."

"Dead!" she uttered, the word with a cry of agony. "Dead!" she repeated, striking her hands together. "Then you are a wealthy man of large estate, of importance, and I am a maimed and ruined beggar—I have lived in vain. Why do you let me live to be a burden and a curse?"

"Hush, Judith, you may find a use in life yet."

"Ah! had I been able to fulfil my wishes you should have died; then Dick would have had all and he would not have deserted his mother."

"Had I died Dick would not have inherited a sou. The property would have gone to the eldest Cranston living at the death of my uncle—that would have been my cousin Hugh."

To this Mrs. Acland did not reply; she tossed her head from side to side and muttered almost incoherently:

"Dick is the conqueror; had I succeeded all would have been lost! cruel! unfair!—not worse than others, only too heavily weighted. Then she closed her eyes, looking like death. Philip