

Which will we do?—you and I, Muriel—leave home and become his adopted children, take his social position, and inherit his fortune, on condition that we renounce our father and change our name to Meredith, or stay here at home in infamy, living on the allowance which he has made all these years to the family of the man who robbed him? My mind is made up: I shall accept his offer. What will you do?’

Muriel raised her head and looked at her brother, her large blue eyes dark with mingled tenderness and reproach, her face instinct with sorrow and surprise. If his was the purity which must abhor evil and shrink from contact with the sinner, hers was that which clings to love and from pity rises to forgiveness.

‘Leave them like that?’ she repeated; ‘renounce them? renounce mamma? change my name and cut myself off from them for ever? And you can do this, Derwent! you? when mamma has been to us what she has, and you have always been her favourite? No! a thousand times over! All that has come out only makes me cling to them closer and closer. Poor papa!’

‘Muriel, don’t!’ he said with a passionate gesture.

‘Yes, poor papa!’ she repeated steadily. ‘Think of his dreadful life!—and then, Derwent boy, we do not know all the story, nor how he was tempted. We ought not to judge him so harshly!’

‘Was he tempted when he called God to witness to that lie?’ cried Derwent, his pale face flaming. ‘Muriel! right and good are eternal; and if our father or anyone else breaks their laws he, as anyone else would be, is shamed and shameful!’

‘But it is not for us to say,’ she said hastily; ‘and at all events, mamma has done nothing wrong.’

‘My mother has lived for fifteen years a life of deception towards us,’ he said coldly.

‘No!’ cried Muriel with a warmth rare for her; ‘she only kept papa’s secret, as she had the right to do! And after all this, for us their children to add to their trouble! No, Derwent, indeed not!’

‘That is your deliberate choice?’ he then said without wincing or wavering. ‘Abide by it, dear, for as long as you can. When you are forced to reconsider your determination, as you will become to me. For me, I shall not sleep another night in my father’s house. I shall leave this evening, and except to you, Muriel, I am dead from to-day to all at Grantley Bourne.’

All this was said with the most extraordinary quietness of manner, a manner that was as new and strange as the rest. Muriel looked up once to see if it were indeed Derwent who was speaking; if he had not changed as much as her father’s past and her own