

Time, of which no notice was taken, passed, although moments seemed like hours. The child still struggled and gasped, but more and more feebly. At last, in the dawn, the little Hilda lay still, looked up and smiled. Was it at her mother's face, or something beyond?

"She is better," cried Grace, turning her imploring eyes to the physician, who held the little hand.

Alas! it was growing cold in his. He turned quickly to Graham and whispered, "Support your wife. The end is near."

He came mechanically and put his arm around her. "Grace, dear Grace," he faltered, hoarsely, "can you not bear this sorrow also for my sake?"

"Alford!" she panted with horror in her tones—"Alford! why, why, her hand is growing cold!"

There was a long low sigh from the little one and then she was still.

"Take your wife away," said Dr. Markham, in a low, authoritative tone.

Graham sought to obey in the same mechanical manner. She sprang from him and stood aloof. There was a terrible light in her eyes, before which he quailed.

"Take me away!" she cried, in a voice that was hoarse, strained and unnatural. "Never! Tell me the belief of your heart. Have I lost my child forever? Is that sweet image of my Hilda nothing but clay? Is there nothing further for this idol of my heart but horrible corruption? If this is true, no more learned jargon to me about law and force! If this is true, I am the creation of a fiend who, with all the cruel ingenuity of a fiend has so made me that he can inflict the utmost degree of torture. If this is true, my motherhood is a lie, and good is punished, not evil. If this is true, there is neither God nor law, but only a devil. But let me have the truth: have I lost that child forever?"

He was dumb, and an awful silence fell upon the chamber of death.