

"Oliver! promise me that I shall never see that woman to speak to again. I feel as though it would be impossible to me—as though I could not trust myself to hear her whining over my husband's death, or offering me her hypocritical condolences, without saying exactly what I think and know of her."

"My dear Irene, why ask me? Surely it will be in your own power to decide what is to become of the whole establishment, and Mother Quckett into the bargain."

"I don't know that, Oliver," she says, with a slight shiver. "I know nothing for certain; but I suppose it will be in my power to settle where I shall live, and I feel that that woman and myself can never continue under the same roof."

"Where should you live but here? You would not abandon the poor old Court? But perhaps you would find it lonely all by yourself."

"Don't let us talk of it until we hear what arrangements Philip may have made for me, Oliver. I shall be content to abide by his decision. But he told me, the night before he died, that he had lately altered his will."

"Not in old Quckett's favor, I trust. Irene, do you think we shall find out the truth about that woman now? Will the secret concerning her (for I am sure there is one) be brought to light with my uncle's will?"

"I have never seen it, Oliver; you must not ask me. for my own part, the only feeling I have upon the subject is, that I may be rid of the sight of her. She has done her best to poison the happiness of my married life, and turn my dear, noble husband's heart against me; and, if I live to be a hundred, I could never forgive her for it. It was sheer malice, and God knows what I have done to provoke it!"

"You came between her and her hope of inheriting my uncle's money; that is all the explanation I can offer you, Irene. It makes me very uneasy to hear you say the will has been altered. What should Uncle Philip have altered it for?"

"Because, after what he heard, he naturally believed me to be unworthy of having the charge of so much property."

"But without ascertaining if his suspicions were correct? I cannot believe it of him. Irene, if he has permitted this old woman to inveigle you out of your legal rights under false pretenses, I shall begin to hate his memory."

He is startled by her burst of distress.

"Hate his memory! O Oliver! for shame! How dare you say so before me? My poor, kind Philip—my dear, generous husband, who would

have laid down his life for my sake; if he was misled in this matter, it was through his great love for me; and I was wrong in not seeking an explanation with him sooner. If—if—things do not turn out exactly as the world may have expected of him, I, for one, will not hear the slightest imputation of blame cast on his memory. My darling Philip (weeping), would God had spared him one short month more to me, that I might have tried, in some measure, to atone for the suffering his suspicions caused him!"

"Irene, you are an angel," says Oliver, impulsively; "but I can't say I see this thing in the same light as you do. However, speculation is useless. We shall know every thing soon. Meanwhile, I suppose it wouldn't be considered decent to kick old Quckett out-of-doors before the funeral has taken place."

"You must do nothing, but be good and quiet, and save me all the trouble you can, Oliver, for the next few days; and after that, when it is all over, we will consult together as to the best course to pursue."

He sees her every day after this, but not for long at a time; for, strange and unnatural as it may appear to the romantic reader that any woman who loves a man as completely as Irene loves Muiraven should feel almost inclined to despair at the death of a prosy old husband like Colonel Mordaunt, the young widow is, for a time, really overwhelmed with grief. Most of us know, either from experience or observation, what it is to wake up, after many days and nights of fever, to the joys of convalescence—to feel that the burning pain, the restlessness, the unquiet dreams, the utter inability to take any interest in life, have passed away, and that instead we can sleep and taste and understand, breathe God's fresh air, drink in his sunshine, and recognize our friends. How grateful—how good we feel! With what a consciousness of relief we remember the past horrors; and should we relapse and dream of them again, how thankfully we wake to find our hand clasped by some kind, sympathizing nurse, who moistens our parched lips, and smooths our tumbled pillow, and bids us have no fear, since we are watched and tended even when unconscious!

Love for Muiraven was to Irene a fever of the brain. It was so deep and burning that the disappointment of its loss pervaded her whole being, and almost worked its own cure by robbing her of interest in every thing that had preceded it. When she commenced life anew with Colonel Mordaunt she was in the convalescent stage.