

"Listen to me, Myra," he says, approaching closer to enforce his argument. "You say you cannot bear this separation; but if you attempt to elude it by any devices of your own, you shall never see me again. You cannot say that I have deceived you; you threw in your lot with mine of your free consent; more than that—you urged me to the step which has brought, God knows, its retribution with it. But if you make our position public, you will do me an irremediable wrong, and injury your own cause. So I warn you!"

"Of what?"

"That suspicion has already fallen upon me for being foolish enough to visit you so openly: so much so, that I had decided, before coming here to-day, to move you as soon as possible from Fretterley; and, if the rumor is not stopped by that means, I shall go away till it is forgotten."

"Where?" she inquires, breathlessly.

"In the country, or abroad; anywhere to baffle the gossips."

"And without me, Eric?"

"Without you? Of course. What good would it do if I took you with me? Why, if the least hint of such a thing were to reach my father's ears, he would ask me all about it, and I should tell him the truth. I have never told him any thing but the truth," adds the young fellow, simply; "and I believe it would kill him."

"And you would give me up for your father?" she says, quickly.

"A thousand times over! My father is every thing in the world to me; and I can't think how I ever could have permitted myself to do that which would so much grieve him."

A dark flush overspreads her handsome features as she hears the unpalatable truth, and her full breast heaves and her lips tremble with the deep pain it causes her. She is passing through the greatest agony a woman is capable of feeling; coming gradually, but surely, to the conviction that her reign is over, her empire overthrown—that she has lost her place in her lover's heart.

And she loves him so passionately; she has always cared for him far more than he has done for her, and his increasing coldness drives her mad.

"You said that I was every thing in the world to you, three months ago," she answers, with set teeth.

"I know I did; and at the time I believed it to be true. But I have told you, Myra, what a

proud, high family mine is, and how seldom their escutcheon has been tarnished with dishonor. And—forgive me for saying so—I know it is my own fault, but I cannot help being conscious of the fact that I have tarnished it now. And my poor father thinks so much—too much of me; I feel as though I should never be able to look him in the face again." And with that, Eric Keir buries his own face in his hands.

She taps the floor impatiently with her foot.

"You are ashamed of me, Eric."

"I am bitterly ashamed of myself, and of all that has passed between us."

"It would have been better if we had never met."

"Far better—both for you and for myself. Who could think otherwise?"

"It would be better, perhaps, if I were dead."

"It would be better if we were both dead," he exclaims, bitterly; "or had died before we saw each other. O Myra—Myra! why will you wring such cruel truths from my mouth? you have been the death of all good things in me."

He lifts his face to hers, and she is shocked to see the pain portrayed there. She is an illiterate, low-born woman, with nothing to recommend her beyond her beauty and her fierce love for him, which, yet, is like the love of an unreasoning animal, overpowering when encouraged, and apt to turn the first time it is thwarted. But she has one indomitable passion—pride, and it is stirring and working in her now.

"Would you be happy if you could undo the past?" she says in a low voice; "if there had been no such person as me in the world, and you had never fancied that you loved me?"

"Happy!" he answers, with a sad laugh. "I should be happy if I could wipe out the remembrance with my blood; if I could go about the world with a free conscience at the expense of every thing that I possess. But come, Myra, let us talk no more of impossibilities. The past is past, my child, and nothing you or I can say will ever undo it. Let us think of the present. It is necessary you should leave Fretterley—where would you like to go?"

"I don't care. You may choose for me."

"Very well, then; I will think the matter over, and let you know. I sha'n't be able to come here to-morrow, as I have an engagement in the town; but the day after you may depend on seeing me. Do you want any money?" taking out his purse.

But she shrinks from the note he offers her as though it had been a serpent.