

he could be false and cruel to Me?'

The mere question roused the indignation of Rufus, 'Whoever said that of him, Miss, told you a lie! I answer for my boy as I answer for myself.'

She looked at him at last, with a sudden expression of relief. 'I said so too,' she rejoined; 'I said some enemy had slandered him. My uncle won't tell me who it is. He positively forbids me to write to Amelius; he tells me I must never see Amelius again—he is going to write and break off the engagement. O, it's too cruel, too cruel!'

Thus far they had been walking on slowly. But now Rufus stopped, determined to make her speak plainly.

'Take a word of advice from me, Miss,' he said. 'Never trust anybody by halves. There's nothing I'm not ready to do, to set this matter right; but I must know what I'm about first. What's said against Amelius? Out with it, no matter what 'tis! I'm old enough to be your father; and I feel for you accordingly—I do.'

The thorough sincerity of tone and manner which accompanied those words had its effect. Regina blushed and trembled—but she spoke out.

'My uncle says Amelius has disgraced himself, and insulted me; my uncle says there is a person—a girl living with him—' She stopped, with a faint cry of alarm. Her hand still resting on the arm of Rufus, felt him start as the allusion to the girl passed her lips. 'You have heard of it?' she cried. 'O, God help me, it's true!'

'True?' Rufus repeated, with stern contempt. 'What's come to you? Haven't I told you already, it's a lie? I'll swear to it, Amelius is true to you. Will that do? No? You're an obstinate one, Miss—that you are. Well! it's due to the boy that I should set him right with you, if words will do it. You know how he's been brought up at Tadmor? Bear that in mind—and now you shall have the

truth of it, on the word of an honest man.'

Without further preface, he told her how Amelius had met with Sally; insisting strongly on the motives of pure humanity by which his friend had been actuated. Regina listened with an obstinate expression of distrust which would have discouraged most men. Rufus persisted, nevertheless; and, to some extent at least, succeeded in producing the right impression. When he reached the close of the narrative—when he asserted that he had himself seen Amelius confide the girl unreservedly to the care of a lady who was a dear and valued friend of his own; and when he declared that there had been no after-meeting between them and no written correspondence—then, at last, Regina owned that he had not encouraged her to trust in the honour of Amelius, without reason to justify him. But, even under these circumstances, there was a residue of suspicion still left in her mind. She asked for the name of the lady to whose benevolent assistance Amelius had been indebted. Rufus took out one of his cards, and wrote Mrs. Payson's name and address on it.

'Your nature, my dear, is not quite so confiding as I could have wished to see it,' he said, quietly handing her the card. 'But we can't change our natures—can we? And you're not bound to believe a man like me, without witnesses to back him. Write to Mrs. Payson, and make your mind easy. And, while we are about it, tell me where I can telegraph to you to-morrow—I'm off to London by the night mail.'

'Do you mean you are going to see Amelius?'

'That is so. I'm too fond of Amelius to let this trouble rest where 'tis now. I've been away from him, here in Paris, for some little time—and you may tell me (and quite right too) I can't answer for what may have been going on in my absence. No! now we are about it, we'll have it out.