

tender to them both, and make them feel that she shared their burden cheerfully, and in sharing, lightened it. She would always love Arthur; and she thought that he would always love her—but perhaps not now. If even he did not, she would never forget him; but of course after her letter she should never see him again, and—perhaps it was better not. And at this thought her eyes filled with tears which dropped silently on her hand. All the same, whatever her good resolves to be brave and cheerful as well as loving might be, the day was dark and dreary; and she could not affect to be cheerful with her brother's last kiss yet warm on her cheek, and her lover's silent acquiescence in her renunciation of him gnawing at her heart with as much surprise as pain. She thought he might have written; perhaps he would even yet; but he had had her note last night, and now it was past four in the afternoon of the next day. It was scarcely like him not to have answered—but surely he would!

She was thinking this, intermingled with speculations as to where Derwent was by now, and how strange it was to be without him, and how dreary the house was—as if a death were lying in it—when suddenly the sound of well-known feet was heard, the tones of a well-known voice echoed in the porch, and Arthur, asking for form's sake if the ladies were at home but setting aside the servant and the answer alike, came through the hall and into the room where the miserable trio were sitting.

For the first time since their engagement Muriel did not go to meet him. She rose from her seat hastily, but she turned her colourless face from her lover and looked at her father instead. Arthur too was pale and evidently deeply moved. He was resolute, but not unfeeling; and if he had put himself in opposition to his mother, and preferred love to home, and the independence of a man who makes his own career to the maintenance of his present social position, he had not decided without pain or acted without sorrow. But he had decided and he had acted; and he was not one to be driven from his point or made to go back on himself.

'No, you must not meet me like this, Muriel,' he said going up to her and holding out his hands. 'There is no reason why you should turn away from me.'

'But why you should turn from me,' she answered.

'I am the best judge of that,' he said gravely.

'No,' returned Muriel, that conversation with Lady Machell under the lime-trees coming back on her mind with photographic clearness; 'we must judge for you. I cannot bring disgrace upon you—what the world would call disgrace,' she added hastily,