

"Do you think that you are not a sinner, William?"

"I never thought a word about it," said the man. "I am not a bit worse than others—but I am poorer, and that makes my faults more conspicuous. There is Godfrey Hurdlestone every whit as bad as I am; yet, were we to be tried by the same jury, the men who would hang me, would acquit him. But his day is over," he continued, talking to himself. "He is now as poor as me—and, if the rich heiress does not marry him, will be much worse off."

"Marry!" exclaimed the girl, springing from her seat, and grasping her brother's arm. "Who talks of Godfrey Hurdlestone marrying?"

"I talk of it—every body talks of it. I was told last night, by Captain Whitmore's lad, that his master had given his consent; and that the young lady was coming round. Perhaps the Colonel's being clapped up in jail may spoil the young man's wooing."

"In jail—Colonel Hurdlestone sent to jail?" said Mary. "Can that be true?"

"Nothing more certain."

"And what will become of Mr. Godfrey?"

"He will become one of us—and learn to take care of himself. And if he marries Miss Whitmore, Mary, he will have enough to take care of you."

"Do you think I would share his affections with another?" cried the girl, her pale cheek flushing to crimson. "Brother, I am not sunk so low as that—not quite so low."

"You are sunk quite low enough for any thing, Mary. You may be as bad as you like now—the world will think no worse of you than it does at present. You have made a bad bargain, and you must stand by it. If you cannot be the man's wife, you must make the most of him, and content yourself with being his mistress. Miss Juliet has a pretty face, but she is not to compare to you; besides she's not the woman to please such a wild devil as Godfrey Hurdlestone. He will soon grow tired of her, and you will have it all your own way."

"Juliet Whitmore shall never be his wife—nor any other woman, whilst I live," said Mary, her eye flashing with strange meaning. "But William, if he is as poor as you say he is, what use will it be to you my continuing to live in sin with him? He cannot give me money, if he has none himself."

"Hush!" said the ruffian, drawing nearer to her, and glancing darkly round him. "Did you never hear of the rich miser, Mark Hurdlestone?"

"Mr. Anthony's father?"

"The same. And do you not know that, were Anthony out of the way, removed by death, or any other cause, Godfrey Hurdlestone would be his heir.

"Well—what of that? Anthony is alive and well, and may outlive us all."

"We shall see. Strong men often die very suddenly. There is an ill luck hangs about this same Mr. Anthony. I prophesy, that his life will be a short one. Hark! was that a groan? Father is coming to himself."

He took the candle and went up to the bed. The sick man still breathed, but he still remained in the same stupor as before.

"This cannot last long," said his son, bending over the corpse-like figure. "The bell will toll for him before sunrise tomorrow." He had scarcely finished speaking when the slow, deep boom of the death bell awoke the sluggish stillness of the heavy night. The brother and sister started, and Mary uttered a faint scream.

"Who's dead?" said Mathews, stepping to the open door. "Ha! Mr. Godfrey Hurdlestone! is that you?"

"What's wrong here?" said Godfrey, glancing rapidly round the cottage. "Mathews, have you heard the news? My poor father's dead."

"Dead!" exclaimed both his companions in a breath. "Colonel Hurdlestone dead! When did he die?"

"This evening, just after sunset. 'Tis a bad piece of business, Mathews. He has died insolvent, and I shall be left without a penny."

"Alas! what shall become of us all," said Mary, bursting into tears, and flinging herself across the bed. "He has ceased to breathe, William—our father too is gone."

The grief of the lower orders is generally loud and violent. Unaccustomed to restrain their feelings, Nature lifts up her voice, and tells, in tones which cannot be misunderstood, the shock which has left her desolate. And so Mary Mathews poured forth the anguish of her soul over the body of the parent, that, but a few days before, she had wished dead, to conceal from him her guilt. Yet now that he was gone, that the strong tie was broken, and her conscience reproached her for having cherished for a moment the unnatural thought, she wept as if her heart had never known a deeper sorrow. Her brother and lover strove in vain to comfort her. She neither saw nor regarded them, but, in a stern voice, bade them depart, and leave her alone with the dead.

"The wilful creter! Let her, Mr. Godfrey, have her own way. We cannot recall the dead. Let you and I step into the kitchen, and consult together about the living."

Godfrey, who had suffered much that day from mental excitement, felt doubly depressed by the scene he had just witnessed, and mechanically obeyed.

Mathews lighted a candle, and raking together the ashes of the fire, threw a fresh billet into the