

'And leave papa and mamma?—abandon them now when all the world is against them? No!' said Muriel, with her mother's soul in her unwavering eyes; 'I cannot leave them!'

'Then you abandon me instead?' he returned.

'No, dearest boy, it is you who will leave us,' she answered.

'Would you have me live here, Muriel?—become the boon companion of our father's pleasant associate Bob Rushton, and degrade myself at last so thoroughly to the level of our circumstances that I shall not be ashamed of them? Is this the path you would think it becoming in me to follow?'

'I do not say that you are to blame for going,' she said, not noticing his bitterness, only putting out her sweet womanly power of soothing. 'You are a man and would have to leave home under any conditions. You have to make your way in the world, and are in your right to go; but I am a girl and my place is at home.'

'Such a home as this?' he said with a scornful accent.

'Yes, even here,' she answered. 'Whatever papa and mamma may have done, I ought not to desert them.'

'I do not agree with you, Muriel. Though you are a girl you have also your way to make and your own name to respect.'

'My name is theirs,' she said.

'Well! you must decide as you think best,' he returned. 'I thought that you would have been sure to stand by me before all the world, and in preference to all the world. The day is dark for me at this moment; but I must live through it even if it becomes still darker,—as it will by you deserting me.'

'Darling boy! but think how dark it would be for them if both of us were to leave them at once!' she said, looking pitifully towards the house.

'He has no claim, and my mother made her election long ago,' Derwent answered proudly.

'Derwent!' she remonstrated; 'he is always our father; and can you speak like this of mamma? poor patient sweet mamma!'

'He is no father of mine!' he answered, flinging up his head; 'he swore falsely to me; he has disgraced us, and covered himself with dishonour twice over. He is not my father—I repudiate him!'

'Oh this is the worst of all!' cried Muriel, clasping her hands before her eyes; then turning to her brother she said, in a tone of mingled grief and horror: 'Do not say such dreadful things, Derwent! they are worse than wicked!'

'My uncle does not think so,' said Derwent. 'In his letter to-day, in answer to my telegram yesterday, he puts the whole thing plainly enough; and he gives us our choice as plainly.'