

kept to her resolution, she must inform him of his son's existence: but she still cherished the hope that he would not deprive her of him. She felt so desperate in her loneliness, that she meant to throw herself on his compassion, and entreat him not to take the boy away, but let her bring him up, as she had designed to do, and feel that she had something left still to render the future not all dark to her. And so she has been living for nearly four months when Muiraven lands at the "Coach and Horses," and dispatches his messenger with the intelligence that is to shatter all her hopes. It is a cold day in January: the air is keen and frosty, and the ponds about Cocklebury are frozen over. Irene has just come in from a long walk with her little man, who is very anxious—like all high-spirited children—to be allowed to go on the ice and slide; and she has been at some pains to explain to him how dangerous sliding is, and how some little boys tumble down and break their noses, and others tumble in and are drowned. But her dreadful stories do not appear to have much effect on Tommy.

"I wouldn't be drowned!" he says, confidently. "I would get out of the hole again, and run back as quick as I could to my mamma."

"And your mamma would give you a good whipping for being such a naughty boy," returns Irene, laughing, as she divests him of his comforter and warm coat. "No, Tommy, darling, I've got something much nicer for you than sliding on the ice. Guess what it is!"

"A pudding!" says Tommy.

"Yes! a pudding for dinner—a nice little round pudding stuck full of plums, all for yourself. Make haste and brush your hair and come and eat it."

The child has already forgotten the luxuries of Fen Court, and is as eager and excited over the pudding "stuck full of plums" as though pudding had never been an every-day occurrence. And yet Irene had to think twice before she ordered it for him.

It is two o'clock, their dinner-hour, and when the meat is removed, she sits by the fire and watches the young, rosy-checked rebel gormandizing his pudding, and feels quite happy and content to do so. She has so identified herself of late with this child—so accommodated her conversation and ideas to his, and schooled herself to believe that there exists no one else in the world for her but him, that she is beginning to feel lonely when he is out of her sight. So she sits by, smiling while he eats and talks to her,

when Muiraven's letter is put into her hand. The recognition of the writing makes her tremble; but, when she has opened and read it, the news which it conveys makes her tremble still more.

She cannot believe it—Muiraven close at hand, ready to come at once and claim his child—his child, born in lawful wedlock, and heir to his titles and estates—*her child*, which under these circumstances she can never hope to be allowed to keep. *Her child*, who for the last two years she has brought up and nourished as her own, and grown to love as she believes that she could never love another, to be taken away—to be reared, educated, and sent forth into the world without her having the right to offer even an opinion on the subject! She reads through the letter twice, and then she gets up, and, walking blindly into the adjoining room, throws herself upon the bed in a paroxysm of despair.

Oh, it is too hard! it is too bitterly, cruelly hard, that this too should come upon her! that, turn where she will, God will not leave one loophole by which she can escape from utter desolation! She is weary of it all—this continued struggle with misfortune—this fighting against Fate, which only results in bruises and heart-sickness. She throws up the game—she will strive no more—she will never attempt to build up another affection for herself. Let him take his child and rear it as he will—the farther away, the better, for she will never trust herself to see him or to think of him again. He *was* hers, and he *is* Muiraven's. His father must accept the entire responsibility of him henceforth, for she cannot halve nor share him—she must have him altogether, or not at all!

"Mamma—mamma! may I have the rest of the pudding?" The piping voice is close by her side, and the little hand is pulling sturdily at her petticoats.

She raises herself languidly and looks at him—at the dark-blue eyes, the waving hair, the *tout ensemble* so like the man whose love has spoilt her life. But this is no longer the little outcast—the poor, nameless, base-born child, whom, spite of evil tongues, she has so fondly cherished. It is the heir presumptive to one of the oldest earldoms in England that stands before her—the hope of a noble house—the legitimate son of the Right Honorable the Lord Viscount Muiraven—the—the—*Honorable Thomas Keir*.

At the thought, miserable as she is, she laughs. The Honorable Thomas is reassured.

"Mamma! I want more pudding. Your