

which had been extracted from his private store, for no other reason than because he believed he had discovered the depredator, and, moreover, had her in his power.

"The questions I particularly wish you to answer me," said he, "are these; and I wish to have your evidence in your own hand-writing: Have you ever entrusted the keys of my cellar to your woman, Betsy Bower?"

Amazed and confounded, Isabel answered, "Yes."

"Have you permitted her to enter the cellar and the store-room alone?"

"Yes."

"Both!"

"Yes, both."

"I will not now," he added, in a tone more severe, "enlarge upon the breach of promise you have committed in so doing, or the danger of allowing to any domestic such a license. That must be settled hereafter; I have other business in hand now."

"Have you ever seen empty bottles in the possession of your woman?"

Trembling all over, as well she might, a miserable victim in the grasp of a powerful temptation, Isabel again answered, "Yes." It was the truth. Oh, despicable violation of the sanctity of truth, when made to answer the vile purpose of a lie!

Isabel had been so entirely taken by surprise on discovering the object upon which her husband's suspicions had fallen, that she had not at the moment possessed sufficient presence of mind to vindicate her maid. A moments reflection, and she might have gathered up her moral power, and done her this act of simple justice. But in that moment, the dread of her own exposure, the shame with which such an exposure must be accompanied, and the unexpected chance of screening herself by another's condemnation, all presented themselves with such force to her mind, that the temptation was too strong for her integrity, and she suffered her husband to write, nay, even wrote with her own hand, at his request, some of the evidence that was necessary to prove the guilt of her servant. All calculations upon the rashness, the danger of what she had done, upon the probability of her maid recriminating, and indeed upon all probabilities, were reserved for after moments of consideration; and in these moments conscience was again lulled to sleep by the delusive draughts, which afforded only temporary relief to the agony of her soul.

The following day was fixed upon for a public examination of the culprit. Isabel had been charged with the strictest secrecy—and even had no such charge been given, it was not her interest to warn her servant of the storm about to burst upon her head. In the mean time, she knew not how to meet her—what powers of conciliation to put forth—or by what means to win her over to the exercise of such an excess of generosity as would induce her to suffer silently for the sins of her mistress.

How often must the guilty have found that there is no true fellowship in evil! for no sooner do they appeal, for their own preservation, to those principles of generosity and truth by which mankind are bound together, than their whole lives are condemned; and such appeal must necessarily be without effect.

Isabel watched the countenance of her maid; and if she could have consulted with her by looks, instead of words, there were moments when she would have offered her the half of her worldly wealth on condition that she would take upon herself the burden of disgrace, and permit her mistress to escape.

While she anxiously awaited some favourable symptoms, the unconscious domestic went about her usual avocations with the same expression of self-preserving care she was accustomed to wear, and which left little to be hoped from her disinterested zeal.

"Betsy," said her mistress, "would it afford you any satisfaction to know that you are remembered in my will?"

"I would rather, if you please," replied the maid, "have the money I have lent you."

"Well, you shall have it very soon; but, in the mean time, I thought you would like to know that your name is in my will for a legacy of a hundred pounds, to be paid you at my death. Does it give you no pleasure, Betsy?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am, to be sure it does; only I was thinking it might be so long in falling into my hands, as to be of little use when it did come."

"And would you wish me to die, that you might have it sooner, Betsy?"

"Oh, dear! no ma'am—what a shocking thought! I was only making a few calculations; and as I believe, notwithstanding appearances, that you are some three or four years younger than myself, I was merely supposing that, in the common course of nature, I might be taken first."

"Ah, Betsy, there is little probability of that. I feel that I shall not live long. I shall not be many years a trouble to you, or to any one else."

It seemed that day as if Betsy's heart was steeled against all tender impressions, for neither the promised legacy, nor the subsequent and more affecting allusion to the death of her mistress, produced the slightest change in her countenance or manner: and Isabel was obliged to let all things go on in their own course, and await, with what resolution she could command, the eventful issue.

There was a chance—and on this she built her only hope of security—that the supposed delinquent would not be able to vindicate herself, even by the truth, so as to obtain belief; and that even when she attempted to criminate her mistress, her evidence would be regarded as a base invention, for the concealment of her own guilt.

To such a chance no woman in the possession of her reason would have trusted her good name; but Isabel was stupefied, and lulled into a kind of drowsy calm—her judgment and her powers of calculation so bewildered, that she neither saw distinctly, nor felt the reality of any thing past, present, or to come. A slight perception of bare facts, stripped of their relations and contingencies, seemed to be all that was left her; and by the exercise of this faculty, she became aware that the day had arrived on which Mr. Ainsworth intended summoning her servant to an examination before the whole of his family, as well as in the presence of a lawyer, and one or two other gentlemen, who had been invited to dine with him, and whom Mr. Ainsworth considered likely to be edified by the method and fact which he himself intended to exhibit.

The guests accordingly had assembled around the dinner-table; and on the ladies leaving the room, the whole case was laid before them in the most minute and circumstantial manner: Miss Ainsworth, in the mean time, being charged with the duty of calling the family together at a certain hour.

Isabel knew the appointed time, but was too much indisposed to leave her room. She was therefore held excused; the more readily, because of the intimate connexion existing between her and the party implicated, and the painful feelings which an exposure, such as was anticipated, might naturally be supposed to excite in her mind.

At the appointed time, therefore, Miss Ainsworth and her sister entered the dining-room; the bell was then rung for one of the servants, who had been instructed to bring with her the washer-woman, and a boy, who occasionally assisted in the house. Last of all, the luckless Betsy was called in, and requested to sit down amongst the others. She entered with a look of astonishment, and when she sat down as requested, there played upon her lips a smile of natural curiosity, which induced Mr. Ainsworth to whisper to the lawyer, "See how well she carries it off. But deep as she is, I can fathom her—confident as she feels herself, I have her."

The process of questioning and cross-questioning then commenced; and although the lawyer objected strongly