

And Caroline unclosed the hall-door, for Miss Kendal to enter, and walked in after her. Also, she made some remark about the pleasantness of the warm atmosphere within-doors—a remark comprising more words than she had uttered consecutively during the afternoon—all the while feeling as if her heart had left off beating, it had fallen so heavily and blankly down. She stood by the hall-fire a minute, looking into the cheery dancing blaze, and saying something about it to Miss Kendal, who had seated herself beside it.

“Won’t you sit down too, my dear?” was all the latter said.

“Yes; only I must go up and see my uncle. You’ll wait till I come down again? Will you go into the study?”

“I’ll wait here,” Miss Kendal cried after her, as she was going, and on an instant was gone.

Characteristically quick and decided of movement was Caroline Maturin; the peculiarity was specially observable now. Miss Kendal looked into the fire, in her turn; she muttered to herself some words.

“I knew he would n’t come; I felt sure of it. And my poor little girl, whom I can’t help a bit.”

But from that point her thoughts were silent. Caroline was absent some little time. At length she came flying down the stairs. The very rustle of her dress was eloquent of some glad emotion—very different to the restless excitement of a little while before. Miss Kendal glanced at her face; it was rosy with the sweetest, tenderest flush, her eyes were glistening with the softest dews.

“Can he have come, after all?” the governess thought to herself. But no. Caroline did not at first even mention his name. All she said was to beg Miss Kendall would stay that evening. Her uncle felt better and would be glad to see her. She dispatched a servant to Beacon’s Cottage with a message, and then led her up stairs into her own pretty dressing-room, to doff her walking things. Miss Kendal marvelled as to how soon the change would be explained; but Caroline was mute. Once, indeed, she half-unclosed her rosy lips with a certain shy smile that seemed indicative of a coming revelation; but a second thought held her silent.

It was not till they were all seated round Mr. Hesketh’s fire, that Miss Kendal’s well controlled curiosity met its reward.

“Vaughan is detained in town by the illness of a friend,” said the old gentleman. “He is a good fellow that lad, after all. And he is coming—when is he coming, Caroline, my dear? What did your letter say?”

“Next week. On Thursday or Friday,” she said colouring with the consciousness of Miss Kendal’s quick glance.