

pure gold. And now when the blow had fallen, would she turn from him, to add one other to the griefs already laid on him?—or would she cling to him all the closer because of his very failure, that she might make up by her love for the loss of man's esteem, and supply by her devotion the rent left by his own dishonour?

This was the question now; and one which Derwent was to resolve before another hour had passed.

They were in the garden; in their old happy place beneath the tulip-tree, where nature herself seemed to have changed like the rest on this gusty, grey September day—such a contrast to yesterday, when Wilfrid's ill-assorted marriage, surrounded by such exquisite harmonies of love and hope, though itself so pale and discordant, had been ushered in by a sky that seemed to have been borrowed from the sunny south, and accompanied by beauty that compressed into one point all that England had of most lovely and well-ordered.

'Your marriage now, my poor darling, is as impossible as my own,' he said tenderly. 'You can no more take your dishonoured blood into the family than I can offer my disgraced name. We are cut off from everything and everyone but each other.'

Muriel was sitting with her hands crossed on her lap—tearless, motionless, silent. The blow that had fallen on them all had crushed her too much to leave any active sense of personal pain. She was thinking more of papa and mamma, of poor Derwent—and of Arthur—than of herself; half-wondering, as the young do, why such misery should be allowed, and could it not be prevented?

'Yes, I know,' she said very quietly, her eyes looking straight before her. 'I have written to—him—to tell him so.'

'What will you do?' then asked Derwent.

He was not crushed. On the contrary, every nerve was feverishly alive—every fibre quivering with anguish. He was in that mood which makes a man exaggerate the evil of his days, and with that exaggeration increase his pain.

She looked up at him a little dazed.

'What can I do?' she asked. 'There is nothing for any of us to do but to cling together, and suffer.'

'No, by no means cling together—all of us in one group,' said Derwent hastily. 'You and I—yes; and my father and mother—but you must come with me. Muriel! leave this dreadful place, and let us begin a new and honourable life together. Honourable!—it seems a farce for us to say such a thing!' he added bitterly; 'but at least so far as we can ever be honourable again. For do what we will the stain will cling and we can never work it out!'