

He replied something vague and not very audible about "the doctors."

"They have just gone. Did you see them? Did they say anything to you? They said not a word to me, except that 'he might get up if he liked. So they *must* think him stronger."

There was an earnestness in her tone, as of a yearning beginning to be felt—a yearning after corroboration and confirmation of her own hopes. But they were in the sick room now.

The old man was leaning back in his great chair. There was a light in his eye, an animation in his face, quite enough to account for Caroline's glad hopes but his voice was very weak and faint; his attitude showed painful feebleness. The revivification was, after all, more mental than physical. He beckoned them towards him. Caroline was at his side instantly, leaning over the arm of his chair with her soft cheek touching his withered, wrinkled brow. Vaughan advanced deliberately. He took his uncle's hand; in a low indistinct voice he uttered all he could find to say. Then, in obedience to the invalid's gesture, he seated himself beside him.

Mr. Hesketh looked from one to the other. "My children—my two dear children!" he said, many times over, keeping close hold of a hand of each, and pressing them in his fond clasp. Caroline, oppressed, she hardly knew why, by the unusual tenderness of his tone, stopped his lips with her quick, loving kiss. Then she began stroking his thin hand, trying not to see how very thin it had become. With a resolute effort she turned to his face again, and resumed for the time something of her olden gaiety.

"You are so brave and strong to-day; I think it is Miss Kendal who does you so much good. I am jealous of Miss Kendal—she interferes with my prerogative. I am your nurse; it is I who should make you better."

"And so you do—so you have always done, my queen—my bird—my darling!" murmured he, lavishing on her all the pet names he had been used to give her. But a restless look began to appear in his face. He put his hand to his forehead as if trying to recall something he only half remembered.

"Miss Kendal—Elizabeth Kendal—is a good woman, Caroline; I think she will always—always——" There he broke off abruptly.

Vaughan looked at him earnestly, and with a slight shade of alarm in his earnestness. "I am afraid, dear uncle, you have been talking too much this morning," he said, in a soothing careful tone. "Perhaps you will be better if you are left quiet for a time?" He half rose from his seat as he spoke, but the old gentleman detained him.