

She was of age. Haggard had placed in her hands the securities representing the investments he had made for her. His responsibility as executor and trustee under her father's will had come to an end, and she was independent. She had thrown away her chance of becoming an enormously rich woman by refusing to marry him; and really, whether he were dead or alive, could make no difference to her.

"He was about to leave England. In all probability we should never have met again. If the frightful thing hadn't happened and matters had taken their own course—for I could never have married him—no, never—he would practically have been dead to me. But that isn't it," she cried out desperately. "Oh, God, if—if——"

Distracting thoughts were tearing at her brain for she shuddered and her hands which had been covering her eyes as if to shut out some terrible picture, dropped despairingly.

"That act of madness—of infatuation—I've lived to repent it bitterly. Yet who would have supposed—perhaps I'm frightening myself needlessly after all."

Her nerves were completely unstrung. A slight noise—a mere scratching sound—sent her trembling from head to foot. She started from her half-recumbent position and stared with feverish distended eyes into the darkened end of the room.

She listened, every nerve strained, till the tension became positive agony. The noise was repeated—it was simply the scratching of a mouse behind the wainscot. There was nothing to alarm her, it only served to break the chain of her thoughts, and with a deep sigh, she crept to bed and tried to sleep.