

was strewn the steady beat on the road stopped, and as her dark figure glided out into the moonlight, she heard her lover's breath escape him in a sob of relief.

"Thank God! I feared you might not come."

"It would perhaps have been better if I had not," she answered.

"Don't say that," he pleaded. "I can't tell you Gillian, how I have longed to see you since—since this morning. My whole life, for the last six years, has been spent in longing for you, to see your face, to hear your voice, but I never knew how dear you were to me till to-day. Ah, my darling! To have held you in my arms, to have heard from your own lips that you love me, and then to lose you! I could bear that, perhaps, at least I could bear it better than to know that I lose you to that brute beast who has blackened all your innocent life. Tell me, Gillian, let me hear you say it, you will never be reconciled to him—never go back to him?"

"Never," she said, "never! You may be sure of that, at least. No," she cried suddenly, "stay as you are." He had made a sudden motion to swing himself up the bank which divided the road from the spinney. "This is good-bye, George, between us. I was wrong to come here at all. Do not make me more sorry than I am that I have been so weak."

"Good-bye!" he echoed, "why good-bye? You have only to fling the wretch out of your path to be free."

"Will that be so easily done?" she asked.

"There is no court in the world," he said, "that would not give you your liberty after what you have condoned at this man's hands."

"Think," she answered, "think what I must endure to procure that liberty. You do not know. I have not told you one tithe of the shame, the horror, of my life with that man. What he was no one can know but myself. The proof of his infamy would be my shame as well as his before the world. George, it would be horrible. I would rather die than face that ordeal."

"But what will you do?"

"I do not know. I must have time to think. My brain and heart seem numb—dead."

"Gillian, you must face it for my sake. There can be no disgrace to you. How can there be? What have you done at which people could point? All the shame would be his. I know how you must shrink from it. You could not be the woman you are if you could welcome such a prospect, or be indifferent to it; but think of your liberty—think of Dora's future—think of me. A little courage, darling, for my sake."

"For your sake!" she answered. "Ah, George, it is of you I think more than of myself. Could you—proud as you are, with your name and position—marry a woman whose name had been dragged through the mud of the public courts?"

"You doubt me, Gillian? You doubt my love?"

"No," she answered; "I do not doubt your love. It is because I believe in it and in you that I shrink from taking the means which could make it possible for us to come together. I know you would redeem your promise. You might be happy for a time, but it would be happiness dearly bought."

"I would give my life for you," he protested.

"Your life, yes. I think you would," she answered simply, sadly at the exaltation on his moonlit face. "But your friends, your position in society."

"Friends? Position in society?" he repeated scornfully. "What are friends, what is position in society? Why, what danger is there of my losing them, even if I cared for a second whether I lost them or not? Listen, Gillian." He sprang up beside her, with one arm embracing the fence, and caught her fingers in his disengaged hand.

"We have our happiness in our own power. If we act like a brave man and a brave woman, who truly love each other and have real confidence in each other's affection, this man cannot keep us apart. Why should we wait for the law to set you free?"

"George!" cried Gillian, starting back and disengaging her hand.

"What?" he said, "look the thing fairly in the face, as if it were another woman's case. Would you blame another woman in your position for acting so, knowing the circumstances as fully as you do? While you remain here you are constantly open to this man's attacks and insults, you are completely defenceless before him. Even when you made your appeal for justice in the court, see what you have to face—the insults of a licensed cad in a wig and gown, the publicity of the press, and, God knows, there are always accidents to be dreaded, and justice is never certain. Perhaps when you have condoned all this, you will still find yourself tied to this villain more hopelessly than now. Why should you stand such a risk?"

"And my child, George?"

"Your child? Why, she would come with us, of course, and learn to love me as a father, as she does already, dearest."

"And when she learned the story, and grew old enough to understand?"

"Why should she ever know the story?"

"If she never did, would that alter the fact that I should be unworthy of her affection? Ah, George, you do not love me as I dreamed, if you would degrade me in my eyes, and your own. Ah!" she continued, seeing him about to protest, "I know what you would say. I know you would be sincere in saying it, but the time would come when you, too, would despise me. Evil cannot cure evil. Suffering can never be cured by sin."

"The sin would not be ours," said Venables, "it would be the world's, which has brought this misery upon you. If you loved me, Gillian, you would not hesitate."

"I do love you," said Gillian, "and you know it. It is because I love you that I am jealous of your good fame and my own. Spare me, George. Let me feel that one man, at least, is pure—that one man lives who is incapable of a thought, a wish, which would reflect dishonour on his own nature, and prove his scorn for mine."

He hung his head, and a great sob forced its way from his throat.

"At least," he said, when he could trust his voice again, "you will try to recover your liberty?"

"I must think," she said, "it has all been so sudden, so terrible—of one thing you may be certain—all is over between him and me. Even if his hypocritical repentance were real, it could not wipe out the past."

"Remember this," said Venables, "that, whatever happens. I am your servant, your slave, till death. You have one friend, Gillian, who will see justice done to you. You are tired and ill, my darling. Go home and try to sleep. I shall bring you to reason at last, I know. Good night."

He caught the hand she offered him, and kissed it passionately. Then he walked away, but Gillian heard his steps stop before she was beyond the line of shadow cast by the trees.

The house was silent when she returned to it, and quite dark save for a gleam of light through the shutters of the kitchen where Barbara sat. In the cool night air Gillian walked up and down the lawn, considering the events of the past hour. Sir George's parting phrase, "I shall bring you to reason at last," rang in her ears, with a gathering clearness and terror in its meaning.

"God help me!" she cried to herself; "I am walking among fires."

The man she loved grew to seem a more pressing danger than the man she hated. She had schooled herself to speak calmly and wisely during this interview, but she dreaded the renewal of his pleadings, clearly foreshadowed in the phrase which haunted her mind.

"I am not strong enough to bear it. God knows what I might be tempted to do in this strait." She stood for a moment, gazing intently at the ground, her fingers knotted together. "Yes," she said, slowly, "it is the only way."

She hurried within doors, to her bedroom, where she rang the bell which summoned Barbara. That good creature found her packing a portmanteau, and stood astonished.

"Wake Miss Dora, please Barby, and dress her."

The woman stared, and then, with a sudden understanding of the situation, began to blubber.

"You are a good faithful creature" said Gillian, kissing her, "I think you are my friend."

"God knows I be, my lady."

"I will trust you," said Gillian, "I am going away, you can guess why. When I have a shelter you shall know where I am. I shall be away some time—how long I don't know yet. You will stay here, and look after the place, and let me have news of what happens. And now, be quick, there is no time to lose."

She finished her packing, putting a few immediate necessities for Dora and herself in a portable handbag and leaving the heavier packages to be forwarded later. She took a little bundle of bank notes from her escritoire, and wrote a short note. "I am going away. I leave you master of this house, of all that is mine. I admit your right to make me a beggar—you shall never make me do more. I will rather beg my bread than defend myself against you."

"Give that to Mr. O'Mara when he comes tomorrow," she said to Barbara, as she appeared with the child. "My darling, you are not afraid to go with me?"

"No mamma," answered the child, bravely, though with a quivering lip.

"We must go away to night. If we stop here, they will take you from me." The child nestled closer to her, looking up in her face with frightened eyes. "You will be good—you will not cry? My darling, it is for mamma's sake. God bless you, Barbara, you shall hear from me soon. Send on these things when I send for them. I shall write to you through Mr. Bream."

Again she kissed the honest, homely cheek, wet with tears, then, with Dora clinging to her skirts, she hurried down stairs and from the house. Scarcely fifty yards from the gate she beheld a dark object barring the road, which on closer inspection resolved itself into a dogcart and a horse. A smaller black object detached itself from it and became perceptible in the moonlight as Stokes.

"Evening, mum," said that worthy, with a touch of his rabbit-skin cap. "Evening, little lady."

"Good evening," said Gillian, quietly. "You are late on the road, Mr. Stokes."

"I've been over to Radford, mum. The horse had got a stone in his shoe, and I pulled up to pick it out."

"Could you take me over to Radford?" asked Gillian. "I have important business in London, and must catch an early train. I will pay you well for your trouble."

"Trouble's a pleasure, mum," said Stokes, gallantly. "As to payment, I hope you won't talk o' that. I'm proud to oblige ye, mum. The little horse is as fresh as paint, he'll take you there in side of an hour and a half."

He helped Gillian to mount, and lifted in Dora after her.

#### CHAPTER XXIV.—THE LAST MEETING.

It was yet early on the following morning when O'Mara, placidly asleep in his bed at the Pig and Whistle, was aroused by a loud knocking at his door.

"Who's there?" he asked, sitting up in bed.

"It's me," responded the voice of his landlord, "I've got news for you."

"Wait a minute," responded O'Mara, and hastily donning one or two articles of clothing, admitted him.

"I've got her!" said Stokes, triumphantly. "It ought to be worth another hundred, guv'nor."

"What is all this?" asked his patron.

"I've got the kid," replied Stokes; "your wife bolted last night, as you thought she would, and I drove her into Radford. She went to the George Hotel there, and I heard her tell the waiter to wake her up in time for the first train as left the station. So I waited on, followed her to the station, and heard her ask for tickets to Cambridge. She was lookin' precious ill and worried, as if she'd been crying all night. She went out on to the platform, and just as the train was signalled, blow me if she didn't faint bang off. She'd ha' fell on to the line if a chap hadn't ha' caught her in his arms. That give me my chance, and I