

I have given her nothing but toil and care. You shall know everything—for years and years I have lived on the earnings of her labour. Worse than that, I have starved and stinted her to buy books. Oh, the shame of it! The wickedness of it! It was my vice—the vice that enslaved me just as if it had been drinking or gambling. I couldn't resist the temptation—though every day I cried shame upon myself and swore to overcome it. She never blamed me; never a word—nay, not a look—of a reproach. I lived in idleness. I never tried to save her that daily toil at the shop. Do you know that she worked in a shop?—She, with her knowledge and her refinement leading such a life as that! Think that I have passed the shop a thousand times, coming home with a book in my hands! I had the heart to pass, and to think of her there! Oh! Oh!’

Some one was knocking at the door. I went to open, and saw the landlady, her face set in astonishment, and her arms full of books.

‘It’s all right,’ I whispered. ‘Put them down on the floor there; don’t bring them in. An accident.’

Christopherson stood behind me; his look asked what he durst not speak. I said it was nothing, and by degrees brought him into a calmer state. Luckily, the doctor came before I went away, and he was able to report a slight improvement. The patient had slept a little and seemed likely to sleep again. Christopherson asked me to come again before long—there was no one else, he said, who cared anything about him—and I promised to call the next day.

I did so, early in the afternoon. Christopherson must have watched for my coming; before I could raise the knock, the door flew open, and his face gleamed such a greeting as astonished me. He grasped my hand in both his.

‘The letter has come! We are to have the house.’

‘And how is Mrs. Christopherson?’

‘Better, much better, Heaven be thanked! She slept almost from the time when you left yesterday afternoon till early this morning. The letter came by