

the fire a stir, and put the tea into the pot. Quarter past! she made the tea, and her hand trembled as she did so. Half-past! three-quarters! seven! still no George. Up to this she had been fidgetting nervously about; after the clock struck she did not move. She forgot her tea; to little Mary's questions she replied "Yes," or "No," at random, till at last the little thing had cut up the silk apron, and contrived to fall asleep. For a time her fingers moved mechanically at her work, then ceased altogether; for her heart was well-nigh bursting with vague, undefined terror.

The little clock struck eight—nine! George came not. Would he never come again!

Yes, the door opens. She sees him enter the room. She waits, trembling, for the kind word that does *not* come; and then the pride and the fierce self-will take hold of her again. She looks into his face, and sees that it is ghastly pale, paler even than it had been when he left her in the morning, and with a sad, stern, expression. Forthwith she makes up her mind that she "will not be bullied," and nerves herself to fight it out to the end.

He comes up to the table, but does not seat himself. "Mary, are you still of the same mind?" he asked.

"Certainly."

"Are you mad? Is this the fulfilment of your marriage vow?"

"Quite as much so, as you are fulfilling yours, to love and to cherish," was the defiant reply.

"Cannot one do that without abandoning entirely one's proper position and authority? Listen, Mary. Your wilfulness has driven me where I am. By-and-bye, you will wish to have me back with you, but it will be impossible; or worse still! you will yourself follow me."

"Make your mind quite easy on either score," replied Mary, in a scornful tone, her pride now all in arms. "You will not be troubled by me, I assure you."

"You cannot help it," he said sadly.

At this point of the conversation little Mary rose, and was tottering towards her father for the accustomed caress.

"Keep the child away!" he almost shrieked. "Don't let her touch me." But Mary took no heed of the cry. "Keep her away!" he cried again, as the child got closer to him; but Mary did not move. "Woman, don't let her touch me," he shrieked. "I'm dead!"

Then indeed, through all her pride, and all her self-will, a bitter, bitter pang pierced the loving, tender heart within, and struck her to the ground with a low, gasping moan, more terrible to hear than the loudest shriek.

When she recovered consciousness her husband was leaning over her. "Why, Mary," he said, "what is the matter? As I knocked at the door I heard a groan and a fall, and as soon as I got in I found you stretched on the floor, unconscious. You must have been low and nervous, and I suppose my knock startled you. There, lean your head on me, you will soon be all right."

"I thought you—I don't understand—Is there nothing the matter? Are you —"