

'That is well, dear, quite well. If only I can make you happy, darling!' she said; and then clasping her burning hands before her eyes, she gave one deep bitter cry which she stifled like a thing suddenly killed as she turned to her husband and strained him to her heart.

That last hour of the boy's old life soon passed, and Derwent came down into the hall dressed for his long journey out into the world. His trunks were already on the carriage; the servants, some in tears, were standing about the passages and hall; Muriel was clinging to him, weeping and trembling; the mother, pale as if death-stricken, stood near him fighting with her impulse to clasp him in her arms and win him to throw over his pride, his future, and make one family to sink or swim together—fighting with the weakness and the strength of her love alike, for what she felt to be his right of election, his sacredness of repudiation; while the father in the drawing-room, his face hidden on his crossed arms which rested on the table, thought back on his prison life with regret—wishing that he had had the courage never to return home at all, but to have made himself dead as he once intended, rather than to have brought them misery and disgrace that he might be soothed by their presence and his wounds healed by their love. Too late now! What had been done could not be undone; and the web which had been begun must be finished to the end.

Derwent, outwardly the most self-possessed of all, kissed his sister tenderly, but without speaking. Still holding her in one arm, he turned to his mother.

'Good-by, mother!' he said in an altered voice—a voice wherein the love which until lately had been so strong an influence over his life, broke through the restraint and coldness which he tried to assume.

'Good-by: God bless you, my boy!' she said, her feverish hand clasping his as if she never meant to let it loose again.

She held up her face for his kiss—his last.

'My boy!' she murmured almost as if in a dream.

He hesitated. He scarcely dared trust himself to the embrace—the last that he should ever give the mother whom he had loved so devotedly—surely no son ever loved a mother better! Then loosing his arm from Muriel, he turned to his mother and pressed her to him with his whole strength.

'God be with you always, mother!' he said in a whisper. 'Mother, dear, dear, beloved mother!'

He kissed her passionately, again and again—her face between his two hands, and his eyes scanning her every feature.