

kind to me?" says Irene, as she bursts into tears of gratitude and surprise. But she has no intention of accepting either of their offers, nevertheless.

"You do not understand my feelings on this subject," she says to Oliver, a few hours later, when they are again discussing the advisability of her departure. "I have been suspected of the grossest crime of which a woman can be guilty; that of marrying an honest man under false pretences; and my husband's feelings concerning it have been made public property; for you can have no doubt that the curiosity which the provisions of his will excited has been already satisfied by Mrs. Quekett's version of the story."

"Can nothing be done to rectify the slander?"

"Nothing. Pray do not attempt it," she says, shrinking from the idea of such an explanation being necessary. "I am conscious of my own integrity. Let me live the scandal down—only it cannot be at Fen Court."

"Why not? Had my uncle lived a few hours longer, this will would have been altered."

"Perhaps so; but I must abide by it as it stands—and I have too much pride, Oliver, to let the world think I would accept a position he didn't think me worthy to maintain. It was a fatal mistake on his part, but it is God's will, and I must suffer for it. I am quite determined to quit the Court."

"Then I shall quit it too. I will not live here in your stead. It would make me wretched."

"Oliver! you cannot mean it. You would never be so foolish. What will become of all this fine property without a master?"

"I don't care a hang what becomes of it. If you will stay and look after it with me, I will remain."

"That would be impossible, Oliver, in any case. You forget what you are talking about."

"Then stay here by yourself."

"Still more impossible. Pray do not torture me by any more entreaties. In plain words, Oliver, this child is supposed to be mine. He is not mine, but I have no intention of parting with him, at all events, at present. Therefore we must go away and hang our humiliated heads somewhere together."

"I wish you had never seen the brat."

"I don't."

"What! not after all he has brought upon you?"

"It is not his fault."

"Poor little devil. I ought to feel for him. O Irene! the bitterest part of it all is the knowledge that I have any of that woman's blood running in my veins. When I think of it I could—I could—" clinching his fist.

"Hush! yes, it is a bitter pill to swallow. But think of the misery it must have caused him. To have her threats of exposure constantly held over his head. Poor Philip! Had we been more confidential, how much unhappiness we might have saved each other. What do you intend to do about Mrs. Quekett?"

"Turn her out of the house!"

"Oh, Oliver! however hard it may be, you should remember now that she is—*your grandmother!*"

But the words are hardly out of her mouth before Irene is frightened at the effect of them.

"*My grandmother!*" he exclaims, rising suddenly to his feet, "it is that fact alone, Irene, that decides me. Had she not been *my grandmother*, I might have made allowances for her infamous conduct. But that she—who brought my mother into the world, and professed to love her—should have systematically tortured *his* life, and done all she could to set him against me, whom he had so fearfully wronged, completely steels my heart against her. Were she an ordinary servant, grasping, authoritative, and contentious, I might have made allowances for her age and length of service, and fidelity; but now I can make none. I am only anxious to rid myself of a presence I have always hated, and now most thoroughly despise. Mrs. Quekett goes to-morrow."

"Have you told her so?"

"I have! We have just enjoyed a most stormy interview; but the old woman knows my mind, and that I am resolute. To-morrow sees her leave Fen Court, never to return, except in my bitterest memory."

"Try to forgive, Oliver."

"Don't ask me that yet, Irene. At present I can neither forgive nor forget. The man who strangles his bastard in the birth is a kinder father than he who permits him to grow up to maturity in ignorance of his misfortune."

The next few days pass quietly enough. The house-keeper is gone, and the Court is deserted. Irene has received a letter from her aunt, Mrs. Cavendish, and announces her intention of taking Tommy to Sydenham with her on a short visit.

"And afterward you will return here, dear Irene," says Oliver; "I can decide on nothing till I know your plans."