

→my only consolation. Look me in the face, and tell me that you do not love him."

"Mother, darling, you are ill and agitated; this wretched business has been too much for you. Go and lie down, dear mother, and try to sleep; and when we meet again we will agree to drop the subject altogether."

"We will—we will. Heaven knows I am only anxious that it should be forgotten—only tell me, Irene, that you do not love him."

She clings to her daughter—she will not be gainsaid; her eyes are fixed searchingly upon Irene's—the girl feels like a stag at bay; one moment she longs to pour out the truth—the next death would not tear it from her.

"*I do not love him!*" she answers, with closed teeth.

"Say it again!" exclaims Mrs. St. John, with a feverish burst of joy.

"*I do not love him!* Mother, is not that enough?" she goes on rapidly. "Why should you doubt my word? Go, dear mother; pray go and take the rest you need, and leave me to—myself!"

She pushes Mrs. St. John gently but forcibly from the apartment, and locks the door. Then she staggers to the table, blindly, gropingly, and leans her back against it, grasping the edges with her hands.

"The first lie that I have ever told her," she whispers to herself; "the first lie—and yet, is it a lie? do I love him—or do I *hate him*?"

She stands for a minute hard as stone, her nervous hands grasping the table, her firm teeth pressed upon her lower lip, as though defying it to quiver, while all that Eric Keir has ever said to her comes rushing back upon her mind.

The scent of the stocks and mignonette is wafted past her with every breath that stirs the curtains: the band in the adjacent square has altered its position; it draws nearer—changes its air—the notes of the "Blue Danube" waltz come floating through the open window. It is the last memory—all her determination fades before it.

"God help me!" she cries, as she sinks, sobbing, on the sofa.

Mrs. St. John is bound to believe what her daughter tells her; but she is not satisfied about her daughter's health. The season goes on—Irene does not fail to fulfill one engagement—she dresses and dances and talks gayly as before, and yet there is a something—undistinguishable, perhaps, except to the eye of affection—that makes her unlike her former self.

She is harder than she used to be—more cynical—less open to belief in truth and virtue.

Added to which, her appetite is variable, and she drinks wine feverishly—almost eagerly—and at odd intervals of time. Mrs. St. John calls in her favorite doctor, Mr. Pettingall. Mr. Pettingall is not a fashionable physician, he is an old family doctor; he has known Irene since her birth, and is as well acquainted with her constitution as with that of his own wife. He settles the question on the first interview.

"Depression of the vital powers, Mrs. St. John, caused by undue excitement and fatigue. Your young lady has been going a little too fast this season. She has been sitting up too late, and dancing too much; perhaps, also, flirting too much. Nothing the matter with *the heart*, I suppose, eh?"

"Oh, dear no, doctor! at least, Irene assures me it is not the case, though her spirits are certainly very variable."

"No sign at all! A life of dissipation is sure to make the spirits variable. Take her away, and she'll be well in a month."

"Away, doctor! what, before the season is over?"

"Certainly; unless you wish her health to be over with the season. And a change will do you no harm either, Mrs. St. John. Why, you want twice as much doctoring as your daughter."

"That's what I tell mamma," exclaims Irene, who has entered during the last sentence; "but she will not believe me. Let us join cause against her, Mr. Pettingall, and get her out of this hateful London."

"Why, my dear! would you really like to go?" says Mrs. St. John.

"I would like to go anywhere, to see you strong again, mother."

"That's right! a good daughter is the best medicine a mother can have. You hear what Miss St. John says, madam. She will go *anywhere* to do you good—and herself too!"

"She has always been my comfort!" murmurs Mrs. St. John.

"And I, as your medical adviser, recommend a trip abroad."

"Abroad!"

"Certainly. Three or four months' run in the Austrian Tyrol, for instance—or the Pyrenees. Please yourselves, however, and you'll please me—only get out of London. It is quite as necessary for your health, Mrs. St. John, as for your daughter's."

"Mother! we will go at once. We will not