

angry—he refused to take the hand that Rufus offered to him.

‘What’s this I hear from Toff? It seems that you forced your way in when Sally was here. There are limits to the liberties that a man may take in his friend’s house.’

‘That’s true,’ said Rufus quietly. ‘But when a man hasn’t taken liberties there don’t seem much to be said. Sally was at the Home, when I last saw you—and nobody told me I should find her in this room.’

‘You might have left the room, when you found her here. You have been talking to her. If you have said anything about Regina—’

‘I have said nothing about Miss Regina. You have a hot temper of your own, Amelius. Wait a bit, and let it cool.’

‘Never mind my temper. I want to know what you have been saying to Sally. Stop! I’ll ask Sally herself.’ He crossed the room to the inner door and knocked. ‘Come in here, my dear, I want to speak to you.’

The answer reached him faintly through the door. ‘I have got a bad headache, Amelius. Please let me rest a little.’ He turned back to Rufus, and lowered his voice. But his eyes flashed; he was more angry than ever.

‘You had better go,’ he said, ‘I can guess how you have been talking to her—I know what her headache means. Any man who distresses that dear little affectionate creature is a man whom I hold as my enemy. I spit upon all the worldly considerations which pass muster with people like you! No sweeter girl than poor Sally ever breathed the breath of life. Her happiness is more precious to me than words can say. She is sacred to me! And I have just proved it—I have just come from a good woman, who will teach her an honest way of earning her bread. Not a breath of scandal shall blow on her. If you, or any people like you, think I will consent to cast her adrift on the world, or consign her to a prison under the

name of a Home, you little know my nature and my principles. Here’—he snatched up the New Testament from the table, and shook it at Rufus—‘here are my principles, and I’m not ashamed of them!’

Rufus took up his hat.

‘There’s one thing you’ll be ashamed of, my son, when you’re cool enough to think about it,’ he said—‘you’ll be ashamed of the words you have spoken to a friend who loves you. I’m not a bit angry myself. You remind me of that time on board the steamer, when the quarter-master was going to shoot the bird. You made it up with him—and you’ll come to my hotel and make it up with me. And then we’ll shake hands, and talk about Sally. If it’s not taking another liberty, I’ll trouble you for a light.’ He helped himself to a match from the box on the chimney-piece, lit his cigar, and left the room.

He had not gone half an hour, before the better nature of Amelius urged him to follow Rufus and make his apologies. But he was too anxious about Sally to leave the cottage, until he had seen her first. The tone in which she had answered him, when he knocked at her door, suggested to his sensitive apprehension, that there was something more serious the matter with her than a mere headache. For another hour, he waited patiently, on the chance that he might hear her moving in her room. Nothing happened. No sound reached his ears, except the occasional rolling of carriage-wheels on the road outside.

His patience began to fail him, as the second hour moved on. He went to the door and listened, and still heard nothing. A sudden dread struck him that she might have fainted. He opened the door a few inches, and spoke to her. There was no answer. He looked in. The room was empty.

He ran into the hall, and called to Toff. Was she, by any chance, downstairs? No. Or out in the garden?