

the court-yard she died right away; and the Squire got into a terrible passion, and told me to carry her into her own room, and lock her up, till the company was gone. Howsoever, I was too much hurried to think of doing that, for I am sure my dear mistress is too ill to be seen by strangers. He do keep her so shabby, that she have not a gown fit to wear, and she looks as pale as a ghost; and I am sure that she is nearer the death than the cross old Squire."

Algernon possessed too much delicacy to ask the girl if Mark treated Mrs. Hurdlestone ill; but, whilst groping his way in the dark to his brother's room, he was strongly tempted to question her more closely on the subject; but the account which she had already given him of the unfortunate lady, filled his mind with indignation and regret, and he hurried on, till, at the end of a long gallery, the girl suddenly stopped, and, pointing to a half open door, told him that that was the Squire's room, and instantly disappeared. The next moment Algernon was in his brother's room, and by his bedside. Not without a slight degree of perturbation he put back the curtain. Mark Hurdlestone had sunk into a sort of stupor. He was not asleep, but his eyes were closed, and his features compressed and rigid, and so immovably still, that, at the first glance, Algernon started back under the firm conviction that he was already dead. The sound of his brother's footsteps aroused him to animation, and an acute sense of suffering; for some minutes he writhed in an agony of pain, and Algernon contemplated his ghastly attenuated form and face with feelings almost amounting to disgust and horror. They had parted in the very prime of youthful manhood—they met in the autumn of life, and the snows of winter had prematurely descended upon the head of the miser.

"Mark!" said Algernon, "making a strong effort to speak, "I am sorry to find you in this sad state. I hope you are not so ill as you suppose yourself to be—that—that you will yet recover!"

The sick man rose slowly up in his bed, and shading his eyes with his hand, surveyed his brother with a long and careful gaze, as though he scarcely recognized, in the partly figure before him, the Algernon of his former days.

"Algernon! is that you?"

"Am I so much altered that you do not know me?"

"Humph!" said the miser, "time has paid as little respect to your fine exterior as it has done to mine; but if it has diminished your graces, it has increased your bulk. One thing it has not taught you, with all its hard teachings."

"What is that?" said Algernon, with some curiosity.

"To speak the truth!" muttered the miser, falling back upon his pillow. "You wish for my

recovery. Ha! ha! Do you think, Algernon Hurdlestone, I am such a fool as to believe that?" "Indeed I was sincere."

"Impossible! Human nature is not so far removed from its original guilt. You wish to prolong my life when you hope to be a gainer by my death. The thought is really amusing. But I forgive you. I should do just the same in your place. Now sit down, if you can find a chair; I have a few words to say to you—a few painful words."

Algernon sat down upon the side of the bed, without speaking, for he perceived that time had only increased the bitterness of his brother's caustic disposition.

"Algernon!" said the miser, "I cannot enter into a detail of the past. I robbed you of your patrimony, to gratify my love of money, and I married your love, out of revenge. Both have proved a curse to me. I am dying—and I cannot close my eyes in peace, with these crimes upon my conscience. Give me your hand, brother, and say that you forgive me; and I will make a just restitution of the one, and leave you the undisturbed enjoyment of the other." He laughed—that horrid laugh! Algernon shrunk back with strong disgust, and relinquished the hand, which no longer sought his grasp.

"Well, I see how it is; you cannot overcome the old hatred—say that you forgive me—it is all I ask?"

"If you can forgive yourself, I do most heartily forgive you."

"That leaves the case doubtful! 'tis no use forcing nature. We never loved each other; the soil of the heart has been too much corrupted by the leaven of the world to nourish a new growth of affection. We have lived enemies—we cannot part friends. But take this in part payment of the debt I owe you."

He drew from beneath his pillow a paper, and placed it in his brother's hand. It was a draft upon his banker for the sum of ten thousand pounds.

"Will that satisfy you for what you lost by me?"

"No sum of money could do that."

"You allude to my wife. I saved you from a curse by entailing it upon myself—for which service I deserve your thanks."

"What proved a curse to you would have been to me the greatest earthly blessing. I freely forgive you for the loss of my share of the inheritance; but for robbing me of my Elminor's love, I cannot."

He turned from the bed, and was about to quit the room, when the miser again called him back.

"Do not be such a fool as to refuse the money, Algernon. The lady I will bequeath to you as a legacy when I am gone."

"He is mad!" muttered Algernon. "No sane man dare act this diabolical part. It is useless to resent his words. He must answer for them soon."