

"Honourable men are not in the habit of declaring love to one woman while they are betrothed to another."

He looked at her again. It was useless to stand at bay thus—he should lose all, perhaps, by this show of bravado. She, though he hated her, and he *felt* she knew and hated him likewise, was the only person who had power to aid him, and she *must*.

"I confess," said he—I confess I love Madame de Vigny. It may be my misfortune—nay, I know it *is*. It has involved me in much distress—much perplexity."

"And this being the case," Miss Kendal pursued, slowly, "you cannot marry Caroline."

She watched his face keenly; as he was perfectly aware.

"Heaven forbid I should do her such wrong!" he said fervently.

"But there is my keenest pain—poor Caroline!"

"Spare yourself. You have doubtless enough to suffer on your own account. Your predicament is equally singular and unpleasant. You must be aware that the first step you will have to take, is to formally and entirely annul your engagement."

"You are right," he pronounced, folding his arms, with eyes meditatively fixed on the ground.

"You are prepared, then, to do that, and by so doing, to give up the future prospects which depend on that marriage?"

Vaughan started, and involuntarily he hesitated, but her clear, sarcastic eye bent on him forced him to reply.

"Everything must be given up. I will not play false to my own heart or to Caroline."

He grew warmer as he concluded the sentence. Some after-thought appeared to lend him courage.

"Only let me see her before she goes," he added. "It is necessary that I should speak to her, tell her——"

"Not before the engagement is at an end," she said, decisively. "You have no right to speak to her till then."

He writhed under her quiet, reasonable, terse sentences, delivered in that clear, metallic voice; but he had gone too far to afford either to resent or reject her counsels. The threads of fate seemed tangled in an inextricable confusion about him. It was with a sense of real and earnest misery that he buried his hot face in his hands.

"To Caroline—poor Caroline," he muttered, "it will be a severe—an unexpected blow."

"Never fear—she is not to be crushed even by that. Better she should know at once. A solid reality, even of the gloomiest, is safer, better than the fairest illusion. She has been deceived too long."

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