

"Gone! where—into the village?"

"Oh, deary me! I knows nothing about it; she never spoke to me. How could I tell but what she'd left by your orders?"

"What do you mean? Has Mrs. Hamilton left Fretterley?"

"Yes, sir—I suppose so. I haven't seen nothing of her since yesterday morning."

"Impossible!—without leaving a note or any explanation?"

"I don't know if you'll find a note among her things, sir! they're just as she left 'em; I haven't touched nothing; I knows my place better; and I'd rather you'd find out the truth for yourself, though I has my suspizzions, of course, which we're all liable to, rich and poor alike. But I haven't worried neither, knowing there's no call to fear but what my wages will be all right with an honorable gentleman like yourself."

He makes no effort to restrain her cackle, but passes through the door she has thrown open in silence, and enters the deserted sitting-room. He does not know if he is awake or asleep; he feels as if he were moving in a dream.

Gone! Left him! without the intention of returning! It is impossible; she must mean to come back again; she is playing a foolish trick, in hopes of frightening him into compliance with that which she has so often asked, and he refused. But neither in bed nor sitting-room can Eric Keir discover the least indication that Myra's absence is to be a temporary one; nor a written line of threatening or farewell. On the contrary, she has taken all the simplest articles of her attire with her, and left behind, strewed on the floor in proud neglect, the richer things with which he has provided her. Weary and utterly at a loss to account for this freak on the part of one who has appeared so entirely devoted to himself, Eric returns to the lower room, and summons old Margaret to his side.

"I can find nothing to account for Mrs. Hamilton's departure. What do you mean by having your suspicions?" he inquires, in a determined voice.

"Well, sir—deary me! don't take offense at what I say; but truth is truth, and your lady didn't leave this house alone, as my own eyes is witness to."

His face flushes, and as he puts the next question he shades it with his hand.

"Whom did she leave it with, then? Speak out, woman, and don't keep me waiting here forever!"

"O lor, sir! don't take on so, there's a dear gentleman. I can't rightly tell you, sir, never having seen the young man before; but he was hanging about here the evening you left, and talking with your lady in the field, and he fetched away her box with his own 'ands, yesterday morning, as I watched 'im from the kitchen-winder. A country-looking young man he was, but not ill-favored; and, as they walked off together, I see him kiss the mistress's cheek, that I did, if my tongue was to be cut out, for saying so, the very next minute."

"There—there! that will do; go to your work, and hold your tongue, if such a thing is possible to you. You will remain on here, and, when I have decided what is to be done with these things, I will let you know."

And, so saying, Eric Keir strides from the house again, mounts his horse, and retakes his way to Oxford.

"A young man, country-looking but not ill-favored; some one of the friends from whom he has alienated her, perhaps. Certainly a person of her own class, and to whom she returns in preference to himself.

"How could he have ever been such a fool as to suppose that a woman taken from her station in life, accustomed to, and probably flattered by, the attentions of clodhoppers and tradesmen, could appreciate the niceties of such a sacred thing as honor, or the affection of an elevated and intellectual mind?"

So he says, in his first frenzy of wrath and jealousy and shame, but so does he not entirely believe. The old woman's gossip has left a miserable doubt to rankle in his heart; but has not accomplished the death of his trust in the girl who has left him, and whom, though he has ceased love, he feels bound to search after, and succor and protect. He makes all the investigations that are possible without betraying his secret to the world; but private inquiries and carefully-worded newspaper advertisements prove alike futile, and from the day on which she fled from Fretterley the fate of Myra to Eric Keir is wrapped in dark uncertainty,

CHAPTER II.

THIS abrupt and mysterious termination to a love-dream which he had once believed to be the key-stone of his life has a great effect upon the bodily and mental health of Eric Keir. He becomes morose, absorbed, and melancholy; re-