

will be so good as to let me know how, and when Tommy is to join you, I will be careful to see your wishes are attended to.

"Believe me yours sincerely,
"IRENE MORDAUNT."

She will not see him—will not receive him at her house. What devil's charm is again at work to circumvent their meeting?

CHAPTER XIV.

It was no affectation of pique or sentiment, or even a morbid sensibility, that made Irene desirous her place of residence should be kept, for the present, a secret from her friends and relations. She was simply sick of the world, and the world's treatment of her; and felt as though she never should recover from this last shock unless she were left alone. She had tried so hard during her married life to do her duty, and win her husband's trust and confidence, that it was a bitter blow to find for her reward that he had not only suspected her virtue as no other man would have dared to do, but had left her for sole legacy a dishonored name—he, for whose sake she had trampled on the thorny love he believed her capable of cherishing, unmindful how much her shrinking flesh bled from the contact so long as she might carry her head erect, her conscience undefiled and pure. She did not realize the extent of the injury done to her fair fame until the grave had closed over the remains of Colonel Mordaunt. Until then her mind had been so much occupied with the grief his loss occasioned her, that it had had no time to dwell on the doubtful position in which she would be placed by the alteration of his will. But afterward she saw it! She read it in Oliver's indignation, Isabella's pity, and Mrs. Quekett's ill-concealed delight. Notwithstanding the good intentions of her sister-in-law and step-son, it hurt her pride that they should press on her as a free-will offering that which should have been her own by right. She could appreciate their affection, but yet it stung her bitterly. She could not remain at Fen Court, where she had reigned supreme, and where the power to reign to her life's end would have been too small a return for the sacrifices she had made there, as a visitor or even as a friend. And then the child—whom she had learned to love so much for his own sake—whom she regarded as a sacred, though unconscious trust, from Eric—who was

about the only creature left whom she could cling to—was she to part with him? Her name had been so cruelly associated with his, she could not keep him at Fen Court, nor even near it; nor should he be dependent on any one but herself or his own father for his maintenance; what alternative, then, remained to her (unless she separated from Tommy and meekly accepted the stigma cast upon them both) but to go away?

Irene was not a humble-spirited, long-suffering Griselda, quietly to accept the indignity that had been offered her: the very fact that her husband's suspicions were unfounded made her the more determined to show the world she snapped her fingers at them, and nothing should induce her to part with the child of her adoption except Muiraven's wishes. She did not feel these things so keenly before the will was read. Her heart had been softened by her last interview with Philip. She had felt so much for his distress, that her own had been, for the while, lost sight of. But when she heard herself defamed, and knew that every servant in her employ was made aware that he had suspected her, her pride rose uppermost: the firmness and decision which had made her what she was came to the front, and had the retention of Tommy Brown blasted the remainder of her life, she would have so blasted it. She had a right to keep the child—she had adopted him with her husband's full consent, and no power on earth but one should part them. She went to Laburnum Cottage, intending there quietly to think over and settle her plans. But when she came to consider, she felt that as long as Oliver knew where to find her, he would never leave her in peace. He would follow, and argue, and plead, and pray, until perhaps he fairly worried her into acting against her own conscience, and to be left in peace was her most ardent desire. She wanted time, and repose, and quiet to enable her to look her future—her blank, cheerless future—steadily in the face. For remember that for Irene still existed that mysterious, inexplicable barrier that had risen up, three years ago, between Muiraven and herself, and she had but one hope concerning him—that he would permit her to retain the guardianship of his, as yet unknown child. To compass the end she had in view, Irene felt her destination must be kept a secret. Her only chance of recovery lay in spending a few quiet months, until the first bitterness of her despair was over, and she had fixed upon her future course of life. Mrs. Cavendish was most anxious she should take lodgings at Sydam, or remain with her at Laburnum Cottage