

"Are not you my chief friend?" she asked. "Is not this my home?"

He avoided her look, replying awkwardly:

"Hardly, when there are no servants to wait upon you!"

"May I not know why you sent them away?"

He said, his haggard profile turned to her, a muscle of his pale cheek twitching:

"I am going away myself; that is the reason why. All debts are paid. I have completed all the arrangements, entailing the minimum of annoyance upon you."

"May I not come with you upon your voyage?"

His eyes were still averted as his grey lips answered:

"No! I am going where you cannot come!"

"Owen, tell me where you are going?"

Her tone of entreaty knocked at the door of his barred heart. He winced palpably. "Excuse me," he said, and took another step towards the door. She stopped him with:

"You are not excused from answering my question!"

"I am going, first to get you some breakfast," said Saxham curtly, "and then to find a woman to attend upon you here."

"I need no breakfast, thanks! I want no attendant!"

"You must have someone," said Saxham brusquely.

"I must have your answer," she said in a tone quite new to him. "What is your secret purpose? What are you hiding from me in that closed hand?"

He moved his left hand slightly, undoing the fingers and giving a glimpse of the empty palm.

"Not that hand. The other!" She pointed to the clenched right. How tall she had grown, and how womanly! "Love has done this!" was his aching thought. She seemed a princess of fairy, fresh from a bath of magic waters. Her very gait was changed, her every gesture seemed new. Purpose and decision and quiet self-control breathed from her; her voice had tones in it unheard of him before. Her eyes were radiant as he had never yet seen them, golden stars, centred and rimmed with night, shining in a pale glory that was her face. . . .

"All that for the other man! Well, let him have it!"