

"Was to be Lord Audley? Believe me," she said gently, "he sees more clearly now. And he is dead."

"But there are still—those who come after you?"

"Will they be better, happier, more useful?" she answered. "Will they be less Audleys, with less of ancient blood running in their veins because of what I have done? Because I have refused to rake up this old, pitiful, forgotten stain, this scandal of Queen Elizabeth? No, a thousand times no! And do not think, do not think," she continued more soberly, "that I have acted in haste or on impulse. I have not had this out of my thoughts for a moment since I knew the truth. I have weighed, carefully weighed, the price, and as carefully I have decided to pay it. My duty? I can do it, I hope, as well in one station as another. For the rest, there is only one who will lose by it"—she faced him bravely now—"only one who will have the right to blame me—ever."

"I may have no right——"

"No, you have no right at present."

"Still——"

"When you have the right—when you have gained the right, you may blame me."

Was he deceived? Was it the fact or only his fancy, a mere will-o'-the-wisp inviting him to trouble that led him to imagine that she looked at him queerly? With a mingling of raillery and tenderness, with a tear and a smile, with something in her eyes that he had never seen in them before? With—with—but her face was in shadow, she had her back to the blaze that filled the room with dancing lights, and his thoughts were in a turmoil of confusion. "I wish I knew," he said in a low voice, "what you meant by that?"

"By what?"

"By what you have just said. Did you mean that now—now that Audley is out of the way, there was a chance for me?"

"A chance for you?" she repeated. She stared at him in seeming astonishment.

"Don't play with me!" he cried, advancing upon her.