

is evidently disappointed; the cousins look miserable; Sir John Coote grows crimson in the face, and half rises from his chair. To Irene's pale cheeks there mounts a flush of pride, and she draws her adopted child, almost defiantly, closer to her side; and Isabella, as her name is mentioned, weeps loud and openly. But Oliver Ralston demands a paragraph to himself.

As the truth breaks in upon his mind, that Irene has been defrauded of her rights, his teeth set and his hand clinches itself furtively upon the arm of his chair. But as the fatal termination of the will reveals who he is, and the reason why he inherits to her detriment, he looks up quickly, the blood forsakes his face, and he rises tremblingly to his feet.

"*It's a lie!*" he says, striking his hand upon the table.

"Oliver—Oliver, for God's sake, forbear! Think what you are saying!" cries Irene, as she catches hold of his arm.

"Let me go, Irene! I repeat it," he says furiously, "I am *not* his son. It's some infernal lie hatched up by that old harridan for my destruction. Yes," he continues, addressing Mrs. Quekett, who has risen, as though to answer him, "I don't care what you say, nor what you think. You have made the misery of this house for years past. You have held the secrets of my uncle and my uncle's father over their heads until they hardly dared to act without your assistance. But your reign is over. Your last victim is in his grave; and you shall not continue your work of infamy in my behalf."

"But, my dear sir, what has this good lady to do with my late client's bequests?" interrupts the lawyer, soothingly.

"Command yourself, Ralston," urges Sir John.

"*Command myself!* Stand quietly by to see this poor girl robbed of her rights, and my own life branded with a stigma, for which no wealth can atone! I am *not* his son, I tell you—I am his nephew, the child of his sister Mary—"

"His sister's child died before she did, young man. You are the child of my daughter, Mary Quekett; and, if the shame of hearing it kills you, it's no more than it did to my poor girl."

It is the house-keeper that speaks to him.

"I won't believe it," he mutters, as he staggers backward. But he does believe it, for all his bravado.

"You can do as you please about that," continues Mrs. Quekett; "but I can take my Bible-oath that it's the truth. And for what should the colonel go to leave you all his property, if it

wasn't? He was mistaken enough in those that he thought worthy, and though he might have found better than yourself, maybe, to step into his shoes—"

"Silence, woman!" exclaims Oliver, in a voice of thunder. "If this most iniquitous will is allowed to stand, I am master in this house now—and I order you to leave the room."

"*You order me to leave the room!* she who is your nearest of kin—your own mother's mother," she says, breathless, in her surprise.

"Don't mention the fact—don't remind me of it, lest I should do you an injury. If you were twenty times my mother's mother, I should have no compassion for you. Leave the room I say, and rid us of a presence we detest."

"But, my dear sir—" interposes the lawyer, unwisely.

"Who are *you* to dictate to me?" exclaims Oliver, turning round on him; "you have come to the end of your infernal parchment, I suppose, and your business here is completed. If you have read it aright, this house is mine, and I shall issue what orders in it I think fit. I command that woman to leave this room, and at once, or I shall put her out of it."

"Oh! you needn't be afraid that I shall star to be laid violent hands on by you, young man, though you are my grandson," replies Mrs. Quekett, tossing her head. "I have my own income, thank Heaven, and no need to be beholden to you or any one.—I think the old gentleman might have done better than choose you for his successor; but, as it is, he did it for my sake more than for your own, and as a recompense for what I've suffered at his hands, though there's few recompenses would make up for it. He led away my poor daughter before she came to her sixteenth year, and has had to pay pretty sharp for it ever since, for I don't believe he's had a quiet home since he passed you off on the world as his sister's son; and the many minds he's been in about it since he married that young woman—"

"*Will you leave the room?*" cries Oliver, again; and this time Mrs. Quekett thinks it more politic to acquiesce.

"Well, as there's nothing more to stay for, I don't see why I shouldn't; but it's not the last you'll hear of me, young man, by a good bit." And so saying, white with envy and malice, she sails away.

"Irene, I *cannot* bear it," exclaims Oliver, as he sinks into a chair and covers his face with his hands. "If it had been any thing but that—"

"My poor boy, I feel it so much for your sake