

The timid, shrinking woman, who hardly speaks above a whisper in society, becomes quite grand and tragic in defense of her child. She reminds one of a dove-eyed, innocent ewe, advancing to the front of the flock to shake its hornless head and stamp its impotent feet because some passing stranger has dared to cast a glance in the direction of its lamb.

"Then she loves me, and you know it," exclaims the young man, his eyes roused from their usual languor by the excitement of the suspicion; "Mrs. St. John, tell me the truth; does Irene love me?"

"Do you intend to marry her?" demands the mother, fixedly. His eyes droop; silence is his only answer.

"O Mr. Keir! I could hardly have believed it of you."

"I ought not to have put the question. I have only tortured you and myself. But if you have any pity left for me, try to pity the necessity which forbids my answering you."

"I think that our interview should end here, Mr. Keir. No good can be gained by my detaining you longer, and a further discussion of this very painful subject is only likely to lead to further estrangement. I must beg you, therefore, to leave this house, and without seeing my daughter again."

"But who then will tell her of the proposed alteration in our intercourse?"

"I take that upon myself, and you may rest assured that Irene will be quite satisfied to abide by my decision. Meanwhile, Mr. Keir, if you have any gentlemanly feeling left, you will quit London, or take means to prevent our meeting you again."

"Is it to be a total separation, then, between us? Must I have *nothing*, because I cannot take all?"

"I have already given you my opinion. Do not compel me to repeat it in stronger terms."

Her voice and manner have become so cold that they arouse his pride.

"There is nothing, then, left for me to do but to bow to your decision. Mrs. St. John, I wish you a very good-morning."

He is going then, but his heartstrings pull him backward.

"Oh! make the best of it to her, for God's sake! Tell her that—that— But no! there is nothing to tell her; I have no excuse—I can only go!"

He suits the action to the word as he speaks, and she follows him into the hall, and sees him

safely out of the house before she turns the door-handle of her daughter's room.

Irene is sitting in an attitude of expectation, her hands idly folded on her lap, and fitful blushes chasing each other over her face as she listens to the footsteps in the hall. When her mother enters, she starts up suddenly, and then sits down again, as though she scarcely knew what she was doing.

"Is he gone?" she says, in a tone of disappointment, as Mrs. St. John advances to take her tenderly in her arms.

"And who may *he* be?" inquires the mother, with a ghastly attempt at playfulness, not knowing how to broach the intelligence she bears.

"Mr. Keir—Eric!—has he not been speaking to you? 'O mother!' hiding her face with a sudden burst of shame on Mrs. St. John's bosom; "I am not quite sure, but I think—I *think* he loves me!"

Mrs. St. John does not know what to answer. For a minute she holds her daughter in her arms and says nothing. Then Irene feels the trembling of her mother's figure, and looks up alarmed.

"Mother! is there any thing the matter? Are you not well?"

"There is nothing the matter, my darling—at least, not much. But you were speaking of Mr. Keir—he is gone!"

"Gone—why?"

"Because he is not a gentleman, Irene."

"Mother!"

"He is not worthy of you, child; he has been playing with your feelings, amusing himself at your expense. O Irene, my darling, you are so brave, so good. You will bear this like a woman, and despise him as he deserves."

"Bear this! bear *what*?" says the girl, standing suddenly upright; "I do not comprehend you, mother—I do not know what you are talking of."

"I am talking of Mr. Keir, Irene; I am telling you that he is utterly unworthy of another thought from you—that he has dangled about you until the world has connected your names together, and that he has no intentions concerning you; he has just told me so."

"No intentions!" repeats her daughter, vacantly; "no intentions!"

"He has no intention of proposing to you, Irene—of marrying you; he has meant nothing by it all."

"Nothing!" repeats Irene, in the same dreamy way.