

I dare say I looked as pale as a ghost; I felt, of all things, most inclined to burst into tears. Biddy—I could see it by the smiling calmness of her face—had no idea of the agony that was making me dumb.

‘Tell me to-morrow,’ if you can’t recollect now, what it was you wanted to say to me,’ said Biddy. She held out to me her hand again, and I took it in mine, trying to hold it so that she might now feel how mine trembled.

‘Biddy,’ I said, ‘it is not that I can’t recollect what I want to say to you; but that I have not courage enough to say it.’

‘Oh, well, if it’s anything you are afraid to say, don’t say it—for it might frighten me to hear it,’ said Biddy, laughing.

‘No, no,’ I said; ‘but—but, Biddy, I love you.’

‘Do you?’ she said.

‘Indeed—indeed I do, Biddy,’ I said.

‘How very strange,’ said Biddy.

‘Strange, Biddy?’ I said.

‘Yes,’ said she; ‘for it is what everybody says to me.’

‘Do they, Biddy?’ I said.

‘Yes,’ she said; ‘and isn’t that very strange?’

‘I don’t think so, Biddy,’ I said, while a sort of tremor ran all over me, and the cold sweat burst from the roots of my hair.

‘Don’t you?’ she said.

‘Well, I’m sure I don’t mind their saying it, if they like,’ she said; ‘it does not do me any harm.’

‘No harm,’ I said.

‘None that I know of,’ said Biddy.

‘Nor any good, Biddy,’ I said, with a lump in my throat growing bigger and bigger every moment.

‘What good should it do me?’ said Biddy.

Words again went away from me altogether. ‘If all the gold from all the diggings in California had been offered me for an answer at that mo-

ment, I could not have given one; and the more I tried to make an answer, the more I could not speak or do anything but think of—I don’t know what harm that might happen to Biddy, from everybody telling her they loved her. And the lump in my throat was choking me so, that, when Biddy once more said, ‘Good-by,’ I could hardly say, ‘Good-by, Biddy,’ in return.

It was little that I slept that night—I don’t think I slept at all that night, nor many nights after it. The idea of anybody being in love with Biddy besides myself was a torment to me; and it did me no good to think that it was as natural for others to love as it was for me to do so. But my greatest misery was in thinking that, while I had been tongue-tied, others had told her that they loved her; and it nearly made my heart die within me to think what answer Biddy might have given to one of those.

I fretted, and thought, and watched for weeks and weeks; but Biddy was always the same—always cheerful, unconstrained, and kind. I took heart again, and, once more, told her I loved her, and asked her to be my wife. I only know that she said yes, and that Biddy could never have given herself to be the wife of a man whom she did not love. ‘Biddy, I said, ‘many have told you that they loved you,—’

‘I told you so,’ she cried; ‘my father, mother, sisters, everybody.’

‘Oh! the comfort of those words! And the mystery, that Biddy should speak them without knowing the load of happiness they would carry with them into my heart.

While I have been writing, Biddy has been sitting near me by the fire, her baby asleep upon her lap. I show her what I have written, and she reads it, bending towards the fire-light. When she has read to the end, she puts up her mouth to be kissed; and as she does so she encircles my