

be a word in season. Your lessons here seem to have agreed with you, Miss. You're a different sort of girl to what you were when I last saw you.'

She surprised him by receiving that remark in silence. The colour left her face. She sighed bitterly. The sigh puzzled Rufus; he held his opinion of her in suspense, until he had heard more.

'You said just now you would die for Amelius,' he went on, eyeing her attentively. 'I take that to be woman's hysterical way of mentioning that she feels an interest in Amelius. Are you fond enough of him to leave him, if you could only be persuaded that leaving him was for his good?'

She abruptly left the table, and went to the window. When her back was turned to Rufus, she spoke. 'Am I a disgrace to him?' she asked, in tones so faint that he could barely hear them. 'I have had my fears of it, before now.'

If he had been less fond of Amelius, his natural kindness of heart might have kept him silent. Even as it was, he made no direct reply. 'You remember how you were living when Amelius first met with you,' was all he said.

The sad blue eyes looked at him in patient sorrow; the low sweet voice answered 'yes.' Only a look and a word—only the influence of an instant—and, in that instant, Rufus's last doubts of her vanished!

'Don't think I say it reproachfully, my child! I know it was not your fault; I know you are to be pitied, and not blamed.'

She turned her face towards him—pale, quiet, and resigned. 'Pitied, and not blamed,' she repeated. 'Am I to be forgiven?'

His generous nature shrank from answering her. There was silence.

'You said just now,' she went on, 'that I looked like a different girl, since you last saw me. I am a different girl. I think of things that I

never thought of before—some change, I don't know what, has come over me. O, my heart does hunger so to be good! I do so long to deserve what Amelius has done for me! You have got my book there—Amelius gave it to me—we read in it every day. If Christ had been on earth now, is it wrong to think that Christ would have forgiven me?'

'No, my dear; it's right to think so.'

'And, while I live, if I do my best to lead a good life, and if my last prayer to God is to take me to Heaven, shall I be heard?'

'You will be heard, my child, I don't doubt it. But, you see, you have got the world about you to reckon with—and the world has invented a religion of its own. There's no use looking for it in this book of yours. It's a religion with the pride of property at the bottom of it, and a veneer of benevolent sentiment at the top. It will be very sorry for you, and very charitable towards you; in short, it will do everything for you except taking you back again.'

She had her answer to that. 'Amelius has taken me back again,' she said.

'Amelius has taken you back again,' Rufus agreed. 'But there's one thing he's forgotten to do; he has forgotten to count the cost. It seems to be left to me to do that. Look here, my girl! I own I doubted you when I first came into this room; and I'm sorry for it, and I beg your pardon. I do believe you're a good girl—I couldn't say why if I was asked, but I do believe it for all that. I wish there was no more to be said—but there is more; and neither you nor I must shirk it. Public opinion won't deal as tenderly with you as I do; public opinion will make the worst of you, and the worst of Amelius. While you're living here with him—there's no disguising it—you're innocently in the way of the boy's prospect in life. I don't know whether you understand me?'