

only—Reginald—would you have loved me had I been poor, very poor, I mean?"

"Yes, yes, of course; but talking of being poor, reminds me that I have to see Lord this evening, and that shows that there is no likelihood of poverty for you, when I have to engage a steward to look after your property—yours, little woman—yours, which you gave freely to your very humble servant, to enjoy during the remainder of his happy life." His manner was playful, but again came the repetition of the sigh. "You don't mind my going, dear?" and he hurried over his wine, for he was not one to be discourteous even to his inferiors.

"No, not at all." And when he was ready to go, she herself buttoned his coat, and enveloped his neck and chin in a soft, white wrap, for he was her earthly all, no child having come to steal away in the least the idolatrous love she bore him. So he went out into the evening darkness, while she, Constance, ascended to her own chamber, from which, by the aid of her maid, she by-and-by emerged a totally different being. She was gloriously beautiful, and the diamonds she wore seemed almost of themselves sufficient to light her way down the old oaken staircase and across the dim hall to the drawing-room. A servant stood lighting the vast chandelier as she entered, and to him she spoke—spoke as though she reigned supreme in this luxurious abode. "I will not have the lights, at least only the branches at the fireplace—if I require more presently, I will ring."

Of course she was obeyed; but the man lingered a moment to watch her as she sat within the mellow circle of the fire-side light; all bowed to the subtle charm of her beauty, all bowed to her shrine wherever she went, and yet, could they but have known, she was even now very, very miserable. She wearied soon of watching the figures in the fire, for they seemed to carry her back against her will into the dim, shadowy past—once she stretched out her hand towards the bell, but no, she did not ring; and presently she arose, and lighting a taper which lay on the marble mantelpiece, moved slowly away to where pale sea-green curtains divided this apartment from the music-room beyond. She lit the branches at the piano and sat down, but the spirit of music would not be wooed; and while her fingers toyed with, rather than struck the keys, strange, sad discords and wails were the only response. Thought, however, was busy, terribly busy—she saw herself in imagination a mere child, standing out on the observatory during a sharp October gale, caring naught for the driving rain or the mighty wind, for it and the sea but too well accorded with her own feelings, so tempestuous were they. Oh, she had been a passionate, wilful child! Then came a boy with a dark face, and hair like the raven's wing—how well she remembered that face!—and he coaxed and soothed her with a tenderness surpassing that of a brother, and at length led her indoors, there to make peace for her by his own deep love and forbearance for her sake. Peace! Would that she had peace now! and pushing aside the heavy window curtains, she peered out into the night. She could see nothing, however, but the roaring sea, which said in its noisy restlessness, that never while time should last would there be rest or peace for it, and Constance seemed to feel that some similar fate would ever be hers till death came and bore her hence. So the discordant strains went on, and this time she saw herself a young girl, just bursting into womanhood, sitting upon the sands on the sea-shore. A boat lay at her feet, safely secured by its tiny anchor, and she was dreaming sweet dreams of hope and happiness, when a hasty step broke the spell which was binding her. Looking up, she saw that same face, only still darker and more manly, and with eyes too which seemed to pierce to her inmost soul.

The rich bloom faded from her cheek, for with this, her first glance, she knew that he had a tale to tell. And she?—well, she had forgotten till now that his college terms were over, and that he was about to enter upon life as a free agent, a man, to do as he liked. It was told, the tale she dreaded—told eloquently too; but she was cold and hard, at least, so he said. Ah, was she in truth cold and hard? Even as he stood pleading for another answer than the one she gave, a second lover came upon the scene. Oh, then she was neither the one nor the other, but melting and passionate, both in her look and tone. She loved, nay worshipped, the new comer; and because of this her maidenly bashfulness even seemed laid aside—it seemed to the dark one, as he watched her, that she gloried over him in this other conquest which she had made. Yet it was not so. It was only that all the strength of her will was centred in this, her idol; hence her

blindness with regard to the sufferings of the one who had loved her even from childhood.

He went away, the one who suffered, and she had never seen him since. Again, she stood by a death-bed. An old man lay thereon, and her hand so warm and full of life was clasped in his so icy and damp, so soon to moulder into decay. The nurse and the old clergyman of the parish were the only other listeners, as slowly, painfully, the dying man delivered his last injunctions.

"Constance daughter, you were not to blame in the matter of your knowledge—and if you go to my desk," he loosened his hold on her hand, and she brought it over and laid it on the bed before him. "No, no," and he motioned her to take it away, "you can do it after I am gone, you are my all now," and again he took her hand fondly in his own. "I burnt the will afterwards which I made then in it everything was his, everything save this house and a trifle which was to be paid to you yearly—you know you sent him away, and he was my only one. It was unjust to you, my darling, for you had a right to please yourself; but the second, the one that now is, is unjust to him. It gives all to you, but if," and his voice became strong and eager, and his eyes scanned her face as though to read her inmost thoughts, "if he ever comes back you must keep to the first, in atonement for the anger I have borne towards him in my heart; only remember, he cannot claim arrears for the time you have held it; and my wish is that three hundred be paid yearly to you in the stead of the one hundred and fifty I at the first intended, in the former will, I mean." Here his voice and breath alike failed, and it pained Constance and the rest to see how he struggled and gasped to say yet something more. At last he found strength, as he supposed, and again went on, "Should he never—never—," but here memory, which had till now proved a faithful servant, seemed to fade away, and with a look of tenderest trust into the girl's face, he murmured "you know," and then after a few low, inarticulate sounds, his lips closed for ever on this side the grave. After that his breath grew more and more feeble, and by-and-by the end came, and Constance entered into full possession of the property, which was to be another's supposing he ever returned. So she queneed it in the old house, she, the poor orphan, whom the dead man had brought with him from India, because that her father had, during his lifetime saved him (Mr. Berry) from a cruel death, when engaged in a dispute with some of the natives. He had treasured up the debt of gratitude, and nobly had he striven to repay it; for even the first will was a generous one to her who, but for this man's bounty, would have been penniless and alone in the wide, wide world. He had been angry at his son's disappointment, for after weeks had passed and he came not, Constance had gone to him and told him all; but he would not turn her away, he would not forget the debt he owed, even although she had robbed him of his son; and so, when time had somewhat accustomed him to the state of affairs, he forgave her and let her take her old place in his heart, as the pet and plaything of his life. And the other lover? Well, Reginald Westbrook would never provide her with a home, so people said, his family were high in rank and moral virtue, but low, extremely low, with regard to money; and the young man, although he loved her truly, was too careless apparently to see that he ought to exert himself on her behalf. But when heiress of the Berry estate, and the vast amount of gold saved by Edward Berry in his eastern exile, the case was very different, and so the old red house became indeed a home to the fatherless girl. She had been happy too, till lately—but what was that? A gun from a ship in distress! She knew what ship it was, but oh, she did not know all. Still a presentiment clung to her that it had something to do with her, and the load at her heart grew still heavier to bear. A month ago, while Reginald had been in London, a letter had reached her, at the superscription of which her very heart had sickened. It was from William Berry, and he was coming home—home, as she knew, to wrest her from her high position. So a great fear had arisen within her—she, this woman who loved so passionately, was jealous of her husband, fearing that with comparative poverty he would care less for her, and then—but she could not face the alternative, she only wished, faintly struggling against it at the same time, that his ship, the man whose return she so dreaded, might perish ere it reached the land. Oh, this horrid secret! How she noted Reginald's love of power and wealth! Was the veil about to be torn from her eyes? Was she to be but fair and beloved, like some other women she knew, while prosperity lasted? Oh,