

longed the conversation, then darted rapidly homewards. I followed, but though she could not have preceded me two minutes, I found her quietly seated by the fire, all traces of her recent excursion banished. Resolved to watch the development of this mystery in silence, I did not mention what I had seen, but, for the first time, I felt unkindly towards her, and my manner must have betrayed the feelings. For often during the evening I caught her eyes fixed upon me with an expression of relenting fondness that half vanquished my rising doubts of her integrity. The following evening we were sitting together, silently occupied, I in writing, Charlotte in drawing, when a handsome, well-dressed man, of about thirty years of age, entered our apartment unannounced. He addressed me with an air of fashionable effrontery.

"You are, I presume, the——?"

I assented.

"And that young lady, in what relation does she stand to you?"

"She is my wife."

"Are you very sure of that, young sir?"

"Perfectly. But by what right do you presume to investigate her affairs or mine?"

"By the indisputable right and title of a husband; for know, young gentleman, that if you believe yourself married to this girl, she has egregiously deceived you. Let her, if she can, deny that she was my wedded wife before she ever saw your face!"

I looked to Charlotte, expecting her indignant refutation of this dreadful charge, but she had none to offer! Pale, convicted, guilty she sat, like a felon awaiting doom.

And addressing her, the intruder continued, "But, in consideration of your childish years, I shall overlook the past if you will now return to your duty. Come then, my fair fugitive. my—nay, I should say your—carriage waits to bear you hence."

But with a wild shriek of abhorrence, Charlotte fled at his approach, and sought refuge behind my chair. The strange scene proceeded, but, stunned as I was by the certainty of Charlotte's guilt, I took no part in it. "Be it so, then, my fair dame! but since you will not accompany me on my continental tour, I shall defer it, in order to have the pleasure of procuring you a safe and cheap passage to New Holland." British law recognizes such a crime as bigamy, my pretty ran away."

The wretched Charlotte had not yet spoken. but she now said slowly and in hoarse & feeble accents, "Monster, I no longer fear you. You have destroyed my peace—you have poisoned my happiness—you have broken my heart—you can do no more."

"I shall try, nevertheless. Therefore, most gracious wife, adieu. Trust me, we shall meet again."

For many minutes after his departure, the silence of our apartment was unbroken, save by the quick, troubled breathings of the unhappy Charlotte. At length she attempted to take my hand, but I repulsed her sternly and coldly, and, burying my face in my hands, yielded to all the bitterness of the belief that my hopes of love, though fairer, had been false than my hopes of fame. The unfortunate then fell at my feet in penitential unlikeliness, but I could not trust my fortitude to look upon her, and she continued her pleadings interrupted only by her sobs, and fatal, convulsive cough. "Oh, John, beloved John, have you no forgiveness for her who has loved, and still loves you so fervently and well? Listen to the whole truth, and do not pronounce a sentence harsher than that I look for from my heavenly Judge. The letter which I wrote to you was true in all particulars but one. I was momentarily expecting Catherine to give me freedom, when she entered my room hurriedly, and said that Harwell had arrived, accompanied by the clergyman who was to perform the ceremony—that he desired to see me immediately, and that flight was now impossible. I resolved to cast myself on the protection of the clergyman, but Catherine assured me that this would be of no avail, as he was a person wholly devoted to Harwell's interest. But if, she said, I could submit to undergo the ceremony, and thus quiet all suspicion, escape would then be easy, as she knew that Harwell and my mother had some business to transact, which could not be completed till after the marriage. Fear and her arguments prevailed. I was led to the drawing-room, where, half-insensible, I heard some words muttered over me, and repeated others, the import of which I scarcely knew. The hated ring (which I soon after flung away for ever) was then placed on my finger, and I was told that I was married. Shortly after, I withdrew, my mother and Harwell remaining together. Then I—"