

I am sitting here, with some vanity in me, needing to be scolded."

Felix had seated himself on a chair that happened to be near her, at the corner of the table. He looked at her still questioning eyes—he grave, she mischievously smiling.

"Are you come back to live here, then?"

"Yes."

"You are not going to be married to Harold Transome, or to be rich?"

"No." Something made Esther take up her work again, and begin to stitch. The smiles were dying into a tremor.

"Why?" said Felix, in rather a low tone, leaning his elbow on the table, and resting his head on his hand while he looked at her.

"I did not wish to marry him, or to be rich."

"You have given it all up?" said Felix, leaning forward a little, and speaking in a still lower tone.

Esther did not speak. They heard the kettle singing and the clock loudly ticking. There was no knowing how it was: Esther's work fell, their eyes met; and the next instant their arms were round each other's necks, and once more they kissed each other.

When their hands fell again, their eyes were bright with tears. Felix laid his hand on her shoulder.

"Could you share the life of a poor man, then, Esther?"

"If I thought well enough of him," she said, the smile coming again, with the pretty saucy movement of her head.

"Have you considered well what it would be?—that it would be a very bare and simple life?"

"Yes—without attar of roses."

Felix suddenly removed his hand from her shoulder, rose from his chair, and walked a step or two; then he turned round and said, with deep gravity,—

"And the people I shall live among, Esther? They have not just the same follies and vices as the rich, but they have their own forms of folly and vice; and they have not what are called the refinements of the rich to make their faults more bearable. I don't say more bearable to me—I'm not fond of those refinements; but you are."