

do to get her living, without coming all the way from Leicestershire to look after you. But I couldn't rest till I'd seen you: I couldn't believe what I've heard, except from your own lips. You've most broke my heart, Myra."

He is an uncouth, countrified-looking fellow, without any beauty, except such as is conveyed by his love and his sorrow; but as he stands there, sheepishly enough, looking down upon the hand he still holds between his own, he commands all the respect due to the man who has done nothing for which he need blush.

His earnestness seems to touch the girl, for she is silent and hangs down her head.

"When we heard that you had left the situation in the hotel where father placed you, and without a word of warning, we couldn't credit it. But some words as the master wrote to mother, made us think as all wasn't right with you; and when weeks and months went by, and we didn't hear nothing, I began to fear it was true. So I traveled up from home, little by little, doing a job here, and a job there, till I got to Oxford, and could speak with the master myself; and, though he couldn't satisfy me as to your whereabouts, I came to it by constant inquiry, and reached Fretterley last night. And now, Myra, come home with me. I don't want to make no words about it: I don't want to hear nothing of what you've been doing—'twould only cut me up—but say you'll come back to the old place in Leicestershire, and then I sha'n't think my journey's been look in vain."

He looks her in the eyes as he concludes, and she, unable to stand his scrutiny, drops her head upon his rough velvetene shoulder, and begins to cry.

"O Joel! if I could only tell you."

"Tell me, my poor lass! where's the use of your telling me: can't I read the signs you carry about you? What's the meaning of a purple silk gown with lace fripperies upon your back, and a pair of gold drops in your ears, if it don't mean *same*?"

"No! no! not that!" she cries, recoiling from him.

"I shall think less of you, Myra, if you call it by any other name. But the old home's open to you, my dear, all the same—open to receive and shelter you, whenever you choose to come back to it; though you can't never bring the joy to it now, that I once thought you would."

The old home! how little she has thought of of late! yet she can see it in her mind's eye, as she stands pondering his words. It is not a

particularly happy home to her: the homes of the poor seldom are. She had known hunger, and thirst, and cold, and occasionally the sound of harsh words within its limits, yet the memory of the dull life she led there seems very peaceful now, compared to the excited and stormy scenes through which she has passed since leaving it.

The old home! It was not a paradise, but it was more like home to the low-born girl, than daily association with a companion who is as far above her in birth as in intellect, and has grown but too conscious of the gulf that lies between them.

Joel Cray takes her fit of musing for hesitation, and recommences his persuasion.

"I dare say *he*, whoever he may be—for I know there's a man at the bottom of all this, Myra (curse him!)," he adds *par parenthèse*—"I dare say he does all that he can to persuade you that he loves you better than himself, and will be constant to you till death, but—"

"He does not," she interrupts eagerly, in defense of the absent.

"What!" replies Joel, lost in astonishment, "he's sick of you already! He steals you away from an honest family and an honest employment to make a—"

"Stop!" cries Myra, in a voice of authority.

"What am I to stop for?"

"You shall not call me by that name: it is a lie."

"I wish to God you could prove it, Myra, what are you, then—*his wife*?"

"Of whom are you talking?" with passionate confusion. "How do you know that there is any one? What right have you to come and bully me in this manner?"

"Myra! we were brought up together from little children; my mother was like your mother, and my home was your home; and long before you saw this chap, you knew that I loved you and looked to wed you when the proper time came—that's my right! And now, as we stand in God's sight together, tell me the truth. Are you married to the man, or are you not?"

At this point-blank question, she trembles, and grows red and white by turns, shrinking from the stern glance he fixes on her.

"Joel! don't look at me after that fashion, for I can't bear it! O Joel! you used to love me. Take me back to aunt, and the old place, and the children, for there's no one wants me here."

"My poor lass! is it really as bad as that—only three months, and tired of you already?"