

The young man came to her side and put his hand on her shoulder. The passionate tone had touched him.

"Poor mother!" he said, softly. "You've suffered a good deal through me, haven't you? I wish I could make you forget all the past—but perhaps you wouldn't thank me if I could."

"No," she said, leaning forward so as to rest her forehead against his arm. "No. For there has been brightness in the past, but I see little brightness in the future either for you or for me."

"Well, that is my own fault," said Wyvis, lightly but bitterly. "If it had not been for my own youthful folly I shouldn't be burdened as I am now. I have no one but myself to thank."

"Yes, yes, it was my fault. I pressed you to do it—to tie yourself for life to the woman who has made you miserable!" said Mrs. Brand, in a tone of despairing self-accusation. "I fancied—then—that we were doing right"

"I suppose we were doing right," said Wyvis Brand sternly, but not as if the thought gave him any consolation. "It was better perhaps that I should marry the woman whom I thought I loved—instead of leaving her or wronging her—but I wish to God that I had never seen her face!"

"And to think that I persuaded you into marrying her," moaned the mother, rocking herself backward and forward in the extremity of her regretful anguish; "I—who ought to have been wiser—who might have interfered—"

"You couldn't have interfered to much purpose. I was mad about her at the time," said her son, beginning to walk about the room in a restless, aimless manner. "I wish, mother, that you would cease to talk about the past. It seems to me sometimes like a dream; if you would but let it lie still, I think that I could fancy it was a dream. Remember that I do not blame you. When I rage against the bond, I am perfectly well aware that it was one of my own making. No remonstrance, no command would have availed with me for a moment. I was determined to go my own way, and I went."

It was curious to remark that the roughness and harshness of his first manner had dropped away from him as it did drop now and then. He spoke with the polished utterance of an educated man. It was almost as though he at times put on a certain boorishness of demeanor, feeling it in some way demanded of him by circumstances—but not natural to him after all.

"I will try not to vex you, Wyvis," said his mother, wistfully.