

Mr. Colwyn looked surprised.

"I think I can tell you," he said, quietly. "They were on their way from Beaminster to Brand Hall. The young man was a cousin of my wife's: his name is Wyvis Brand, and the lady in black was his mother. They have come home after an absence of nearly four-and-twenty years."

Lady Caroline was too polite to say what she really felt—that she was sorry to hear it.

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## CHAPTER V.

### VYVIS BRAND.

On the evening of the day on which Lady Caroline drove with Janetta Colwyn to Beaminster, the lady who had fainted by the wayside was sitting in a rather gloomy-looking room at Brand Hall—a room known in the household as the Blue Drawing-room. It had not the look of a drawing-room exactly: it was paneled in oak, which had grown black with age, as had also the great oak beams that crossed the ceiling and the polished floor. The furniture also was of oak, and the hangings of dark but faded blue, while the blue velvet of the chairs and the square of Oriental carpet, in which blue tints also preponderated, did not add cheerfulness to the scene. One or two great blue vases set on the carved oak mantel-piece, and some smaller blue ornaments on a sideboard, matched the furniture in tint; but it was remarkable that on a day when country gardens were overflowing with blossom, there was not a single flower or green leaf in any of the vases. No smaller and lighter ornaments, no scrap of woman's handiwork—lace or embroidery—enlivened the place: no books were set upon the table. A fire would not have been out of season, for the evenings were chilly, and it would have had a cheery look; but there was no attempt at cheeriness. The woman who sat in one of the high-backed chairs was pale and sad: her folded hands lay listlessly clasped together on her lap, and the somber garb that she wore was as unrelieved by any gleam of brightness as the room itself. In the gathering gloom of a chilly summer evening, even the rings upon her fingers could not flash. Her white face, in its setting of rough, wavy grey hair, over which she wore a covering of black lace, looked almost statuesque in its profound tranquility. But it was not the tranquility of comfort and prosperity that had settled on that pale, worn, high-featured face—it was rather the tranquility that comes of accepted sorrow and inextinguishable despair.

She had sat thus for fully half an hour when the door was roughly opened, and the young man whom Mr. Colwyn had named as Wyvis Brand came lounging into the room. He