

"You do not vex me exactly," he answered, "but you stir my old memories too often. I want to forget the past. Why else did I come down here, where I have never been since I was a child? where Juliet never set foot, and where I have no association with that miserable passage in my life?"

"Then why do you bring those men down, Wyvis? For they know the past: *they* will recall old associations——"

"They amuse me. I cannot be without companions. I do not pretend to cut myself off from the whole world."

As he spoke thus briefly and coldly, he stopped to strike a match, and then lighted the wax candles that stood on the black sideboard. By this act he meant perhaps to put a stop to the conversation of which he was heartily tired. But Mrs. Brand, in the half- bewildered condition of mind to which long anxiety and sorrow had reduced her, did not know the virtue of silence, and did not possess the magic quality of tact.

"You might find companions down here," she said, pertinaciously, "people suited to your position—old friends of your father's, perhaps——"

"Will they be so willing to make friends with my father's son?" Wyvis burst out bitterly. Then, seeing from her white and stricken face that he had hurt her, he came to her side and kissed her penitently. "Forgive me, mother," he said, "if I say what you don't like. I've been hearing about my father ever since I came to Beaminster two days ago. I have heard nothing but what confirmed my previous idea about his character. Even poor old Colwyn couldn't say any good of him. He went to the devil as fast as ever he could go, and his son seems likely to follow in his footsteps. That's the general opinion, and, by George, I think I shall soon do something to justify it."

"You need not live as your father did, Wyvis," said his mother, whose tears were flowing fast.

"If I don't, nobody will believe it," said the young man, moodily. "There is no fighting against fate. The Brands are doomed, mother: we shall die out and be forgotten—all the better for the world, too. It is time we were done with: we are a bad lot."

"Cuthbert is not bad. And you—Wyvis, you have your child."

"Have I? A child that I have not seen since it was six months old! Brought up by its mother—a woman without heart or principle or anything that is good! Much comfort the child is likely to be to me when I get hold of it."

"When will that be?" said Mrs. Brand, as if speaking to herself rather than to him. But Wyvis replied:

"When she is tired of it—not before. I do not know where she is."