

"Wyvis, Wyvis," said his mother, in a tone of pain, "I kept you away for your own sake. I thought you would be happier abroad."

"Oh—happier!" said the young man, rather scornfully. "Happiness isn't meant for me: it isn't in my line. It makes no difference to me whether I am here or in Paris. I should have been here long ago if I had had any idea that things were going wrong in this way."

"I suppose," said Mrs. Brand, carefully controlling her voice, "that you will not have the visitors you spoke of if the house is in so bad a state."

"Not have visitors? Of course I shall have visitors. What else is there for me to do with myself? We shall get the house put pretty straight by the 12th. Not that there will be any shooting worth speaking of on my place."

"If nobody comes before the 12th, I think we can make the house habitable. I will do my best, Wyvis."

Wyvis laughed again, but in a softer key. "You!" he said. "You can't do much, mother. It isn't the sort of thing you care about. You stay in your own rooms and do your needle-work; I'll see to the house. Some men are coming long before the 12th—the day after tomorrow, I believe."

"Who?"

"Oh, Dering and St. John and Ponsonby, I expect. I don't know whether they will bring any one else."

"The worst men of the worst set you know!" sighed his mother, under her breath. "Could not you have left them behind?"

She felt rather than saw how he frowned—how his hand twitched with impatience.

"What sort of friends am I likely to have?" he said. "Why not those that amuse me most?"

Then he rose and went over to the window, where he stood for some time looking out. Turning round at last, he perceived from a slight familiar movement of his mother's hand over her eyes that she was weeping, and it seemed as if his heart smote him at the sight.

"Come, mother," he said, kindly, "don't take what I say and do so much to heart. You know I'm no good, and never shall do anything in the world. You have Cuthbert to comfort you—"

"Cuthbert is nothing to me—*nothing*—compared with you, Wyvis."