

"Could it be her mother?" said my mother.

"Who can tell?" returned my father. "It is the less likely that the deed seems to have been prompted by revenge."

"If she be a gipsy's child——" said my mother.

"The gipsies," interrupted my father, "have always been more given to taking other people's children than forsaking their own. But one of them might have had reason for being ashamed of her child, and dreading the severity of her family, might have abandoned it, with the intention of re-possessing herself of it, and passing it off as the child of gentlefolks she had picked up. I don't know their habits and ways sufficiently; but from what I have heard, that seems possible. However, it is not so easy as it might have been once to succeed in such an attempt. If we should fail in finding her to-night, the police all over the country can be apprised of the fact in a few hours, and the thief can hardly escape."

"But if she *should* be the mother?" suggested my mother.

"She will have to *prove* that."

"And then?"

"What then?" returned my father and began pacing up and down the room, stopping now and then to listen for the horses' hoofs.

"Would you give her up?" persisted my mother.

Still my father made no reply. He was evidently much agitated—more, I fancied, by my mother's question than by the present trouble. He left the room, and presently his whistle for Wagtail pierced the still air. A moment more, and we heard them all ride out of the paved yard. I had never known him leave my mother without an answer before.

We who were left behind were in evil plight. There was not a dry eye amongst the women, I am certain, while Harry was in floods of tears, and Charley was howling. We could not send them to bed in such a state, so we kept them with us in the drawing-room, where they soon fell fast asleep, one in an easy-chair, the other on a sheep-skin mat. Connie lay quite still, and my mother talked so sweetly and gently that she soon made me quiet too. But I was haunted with the idea somehow—I think I must have been wandering a little, for I was not well—that it was a child of my own that was lost out in the dark night, and that I could not anyhow reach her. I cannot explain the odd kind of feeling it was—as if a dream had wandered out of the region of sleep, and half possessed my waking brain. Every now and then my mother's voice would bring me back to my senses, and I would understand it all perfectly; but in a few moments I would be involved

once more in a mazy search after my child. Perhaps, however, as it was by that time late, sleep had, if such a thing be possible, invaded a part of my brain, leaving another part able to receive the impressions of the external about me. I can recall some of the things my mother said—one in particular.

"It is more absurd," she said, "to trust God by halves, than it is not to believe in him at all. Your papa taught me that before one of you was born."

When my mother said anything in the way of teaching us, which was not often, she would generally add, "Your papa taught me that," as if she would take refuge from the assumption of teaching even her own girls. But we set a good deal of such assertion down to her modesty, and the evidently inextricable blending of the thought of my father with every movement of her mental life.

"I remember quite well," she went on, "how he made that truth dawn upon me one night as we sat together beside the old mill. Ah! you don't remember the old mill; it was pulled down while Wynnie was a mere baby."

"No, mamma; I remember it perfectly," I said.

"Do you really? Well, we were sitting beside the mill one Sunday evening after service; for we always had a walk before going home from church. You would hardly think it now, but after preaching he was then always depressed, and the more eloquently he had spoken, the more he felt as if he had made an utter failure. At first I thought it came only from fatigue, and wanted him to go home and rest; but he would say he liked nature to come before supper, for nature restored him by telling him that it was not of the slightest consequence if he had failed, whereas his supper only made him feel that he would do better next time. Well, that night, you will easily believe he startled me when he said, after sitting for some time silent, 'Ethel, if that yellow hammer were to drop down dead now, and God not care, God would not be God any longer.' Doubtless I showed myself something between puzzled and shocked, for he proceeded with some haste to explain to me how what he had said was true. 'Whatever belongs to God is essential to God,' he said. 'He is one pure, clean essence of being, to use our poor words to describe the indescribable. Nothing hangs about Him that does not belong to Him—that He could part with and be nothing the worse. Still less is there anything He could part with and be the worse. Whatever belongs to Him is of His own kind, is part of Himself, so to speak. Therefore there is nothing indifferent to His character to be found in Him;

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