



FOR LOVE

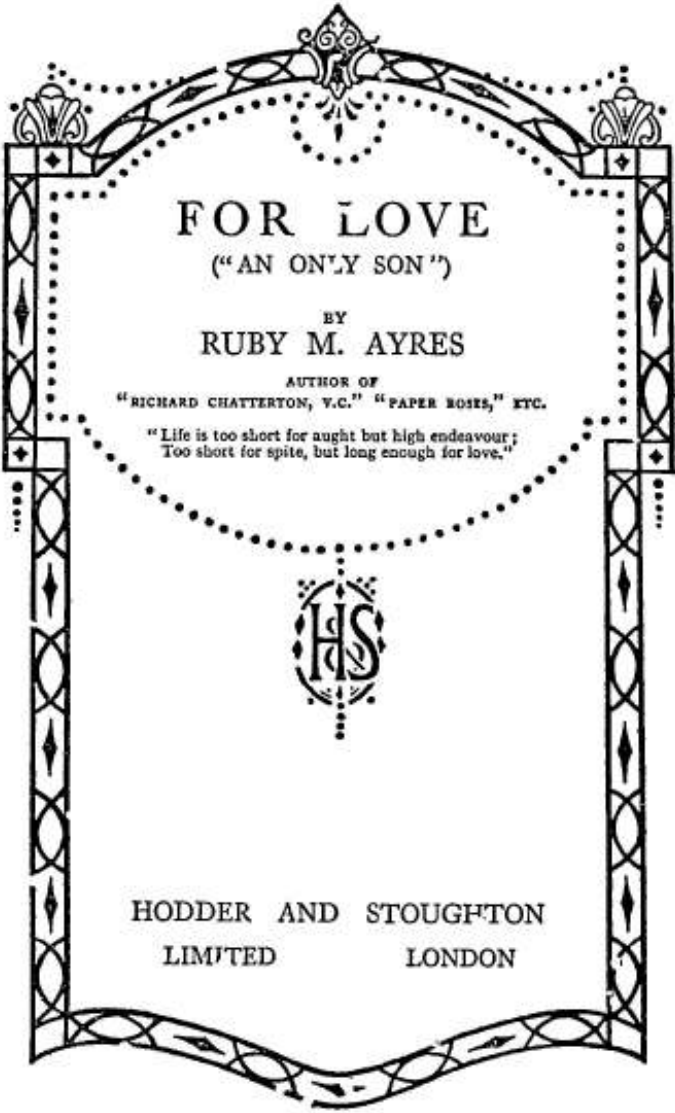
NOVELS AND STORIES BY  
RUBY M. AYRES



- The Planter of the Tree  
Wynne of Windwhistle  
The Man the Women Loved  
    Spoilt Music  
    Overheard  
    Charity's Chosen  
    The Faint Heart  
The Marriage Handicap  
    Candlelight  
    Paul in Possession  
The Romance of a Rogue  
    Ribbons and Laces  
    A Gamble with Love  
    The Street Below  
The Little Lady in Lodgings  
    The Year After  
The Man Without a Heart  
The One Who Stood By  
    The Eager Search  
    Love and a Lie  
    The Lover Who Lied  
The Matherson Marriage  
    The Fortune Hunter  
The Story of an Ugly Man  
    The Scar  
    Nobody's Lover  
    The Highest Bidder  
    Brown Sugar  
    A Bachelor Husband  
    The Woman Hater  
Richard Chatterton, V.C.  
    Paper Roses  
The Second Honeymoon  
    The Master Man  
The Winds of the World  
    The Black Sheep  
    The Remembered Kiss  
    For Love  
The Long Lane to Happiness  
    A Phantom Lover  
    The Uphill Poad  
    The Girl Next Door  
    The Litt'lst Lover  
    The Beggar Man  
    The One Who Forgot  
    Invalided Out  
    A Man of His Word  
    The Dancing Master  
The Marriage of Barry Wicklow

HODDER AND  
STOUGHTON  
Ltd., London





FOR LOVE

("AN ONLY SON")

BY  
RUBY M. AYRES

AUTHOR OF  
"RICHARD CHATTERTON, V.C." "PAPER ROSES," ETC.

"Life is too short for aught but high endeavour;  
Too short for spite, but long enough for love."



HODDER AND STOUGHTON  
LIMITED LONDON

*Made and Printed in Great Britain by C. Tinsley & Co., Ltd.  
Liverpool, London and Prescott*

## CHAPTER I

THE bedroom door opened and closed again with a slam as Philip Winterdick—an immaculate figure in white flannels—came out on to the landing, paused a moment to light a cigarette, and then went on down the wide staircase two at a time.

It was about three o'clock on a hot summer's afternoon, and the big hall of the old house looked invitingly cool and restful, with its dark oak and polished floor, but young Winterdick passed through it without a glance, and went on eagerly to the open front door and the glare of sunlight outside.

He was a fine looking young fellow, a typical English gentleman in appearance, tall, long-limbed and square shouldered, with the clean-cut, stalwart look of health about him which he had inherited from his father, the father of whom he suddenly thought as he stepped out into the sunshine, and with a little exclamation he turned and went back into the house, pushing open a closed door on the right and thrusting his head round.

"You there, gov'nor?"

"Yes, Phil."

Philip pushed the door wider and went in.

"Sorry to bother you if you're busy—but I forgot to tell you that I'm overdrawn at the bank—beastly nuisance! The manager fellow wrote me quite a nasty letter about it this morning—confounded cheek, I call it! Anyone would think he was afraid he wouldn't get his money."

He walked over to the fireplace and looked at his handsome reflection in the glass which hung above it.

"You might jolly well tell him off when you pay in for me," he said again, intent on the readjustment of his tie.

The man at the table did not answer, and, struck by his silence, Philip swung round.

"Anything the matter, gov'nor?"

"No, my boy—no, no!"

The hastiness of the answer might have made a more observant person suspicious, but Philip was not observant. He had never had any need to be in the eight-and-twenty years of his life, which had run so smoothly and happily that he had hardly realised how swiftly they had fled.

He turned on his heel now and sauntered to the door. "Well, you'll see to it for me, won't you?"

The eyes of the man at the table followed the 'all young figure wistfully.

"Yes, I'll see to it—I'll see to it, my boy—and, Phil, where are you going?"

Philip glanced back over his shoulder.

"To the Dennisons'—they've got a rotten tennis party."

Philip adored tennis, but, like a true Britisher, he always spoke disparagingly of things he adored.

The elder man's handsome face broke into a sudden smile.

"Good—glad to hear it," he said heartily. "Decent people, the Dennisons; very decent people."

Philip raised his brows.

"Thought you didn't like 'em," he said amazed. "Thought they weren't blue-blooded enough for you and the mater."

"Tut, tut . . . your mother says so, but personally I always liked old Dennison—thoroughly decent fellow. Well, well—run along."

There was a little perplexed frown between his son's eyes as he went out; he was quite sure that he had never before heard his father say that he liked old Dennison; as a matter of fact, he did not like him himself, and it was certainly not for the Dennisons' sake that he was going to the house this afternoon, but because Kitty was to be there—and Kitty . . . well, Kitty was topping!

He hastened his steps, cut across the lawn and went out on to the scorching high road.

He wondered if he would have the luck to get Kitty to himself, or if . . . He swung round sharply as someone spoke his name with a smothered laugh.

"Phil! Are you walking for a wager?" And there was Kitty beside him.

The hot blood rushed to young Winterdick's face. He took her hand eagerly.

"Kitty! I was racing off to get to you, and here you are. What luck!" He glanced at her frock, a filmy creation of lace and muslin. "I say, aren't you going to play?" he asked disappointedly.

She shook her head; she made a little grimace.

"It's too hot, and I have getting untidy; and besides, you know I can't play properly."

"What does that matter? I wanted to play with you"

"

He was undisguisedly disappointed, his face fell.

She touched his arm with the tips of her white fingers.

"Never mind, we can sit out together, can't we? Oh, don't, someone will see us." He let her hand go instantly; he walked on with great dignity for a few steps.

Kitty Arlington looked up at him, and a little smile crept into her eyes.

"You'll have Eva Dennison to play with," she said teasingly. "She's a splendid player anyway—she serves as well as you do."

"I don't want to play with her—I don't like her—she isn't my sort at all," said Philip grumpily.

She pretended to be surprised.

"Not your sort! Then why ever are you going to the house?"

"Because you are," came the blunt answer. "Because—oh, confound it. . . ." A car had just overtaken them and slowed down.

Several girls in white frocks packed happily into the one seat called a greeting to them.

"Are you going to the Dennisons'! Can we give you a lift?"

Young Winterdick laughed.

"A lift! Why you're packed like sardines already. I—oh, all right, I don't mind"—this last to Kitty, who had declared that she was tired out and was not going to walk any further.

So they both packed in somehow, and Philip had no chance to speak to Kitty again till they reached the Dennisons'.

Whatever the Winterdick's thoughts of their nearest neighbours, the Dennisons had an undisputably lovely garden.

Philip had looked forward to an afternoon spent on the shady lawns or in the flower gardens with Kitty Arlington, but there were so many other people who wanted to talk both to him and to her, and presently he found himself the width of the lawn away from her.

It was a bitter disappointment. He had made up his mind to ask her to marry him that afternoon. She was so everything he wanted, so dainty—such a lady—so. . . . Had he been quite honest he would probably have added in his mind that she was so everything that was different to Eva Dennison, and even as the comparison was passing through his thoughts Eva herself crossed the lawn and came up to him.

"Will you play with me, Mr. Winterdick?"

He roused himself with a start and turned.

"Delighted," he said, absently. "I'm afraid you'll find I'm a bit off form to-day, but—"

"You are always a splendid player," she said.

She glanced up at him and quickly away again with a little cloud in her eyes. She knew quite well that he was wishing he could have had Kitty for a partner—Kitty,



who hit most of the balls up in the trees, Kitty who could not run because she wore such high-heeled shoes, Kitty who hated getting hot and ruffled.

She walked across the lawn beside him, silently swinging her racquet. She was tall—her head reached the level of young Winterlick's stalwart shoulder—and slenderly built. She wore the severest of white skirts and a business-like canvas blouse, cut short at the sleeves, and her arms were slightly tanned by the sun, and there was the faintest powdering of freckles on her face. She was hatless, and her thick brown hair was rather severely dressed in a simple coil, though round her forehead it had escaped a little, and curled childishly.

She was something better than pretty, so a disinterested onlooker would have said; something infinitely better than the pink-and-whiteness of Kitty Arlington; something that arrested attention by the frankness of the grey eyes and the firmness of the rather wide mouth.

Just now she was looking rather grave, but when she smiled her whole face lit up as if by magic and a distracting dimple made its appearance.

But Philip had no eyes for dimples that were not to be seen in Kitty's face, and, though he loved tennis, he played badly and lost the set.

"I'm sorry,"—he looked at Eva rather shamefacedly. "I told you I felt off my form—perhaps we may be allowed a revenge later."

Eva stooped and picked up a ball.

"It doesn't matter in the least," she said quickly. "And we can have our revenge at once, if you like."

But Philip had seen that Kitty was momentarily alone, and he stammered out that he would rather wait, that—he was going on with a lot more excuses, but Eva cut him short.

"It's just as you like," she said, and, though she turned away, she felt rather than saw that he immediately crossed the lawn to the empty chair beside Kitty Arlington.

A man who had been one of their opponents came up to Eva.

"Isn't Winterdick playing again? What's the matter with him? Never saw him play such a rotten game."

"He says he'll play later," she answered, but she kept her eyes averted as she spoke. And under the trees Philip had persuaded Kitty to go with him to the flower garden.

"I'm fed up with tennis," he said, boyishly. "I played a rotten game—Miss Dennison is wild with me, I expect. I wanted to be with you all the time . . . let's go and look at the roses."

She agreed, with a little laugh; she knew quite well that

he was going to ask her to marry him, and she also knew what he did not know, that she had been planning and scheming for this all the summer.

The Winterdicks were rich—the richest people in the county—and Philip was an only son. He was good-looking, too, and she liked the thought of living at the Highway House and of having as much money as even she could spend, so it was with deliberate intent that she slipped a hand through his arm as soon as they were out of sight, and gave a little sigh of contentment.

"I thought you were going to desert me all the afternoon for Eva," she said, softly.

"For Eva!" he echoed her words in sheer amazement.

"Why, I hardly know her," he added.

She made a little grimace.

"But she's such a fine tennis player, and you love tennis——"

"There are many things I love a thousand times better," he answered swiftly. "You, for instance. . . ." Then suddenly he stopped and caught her in his arms. "Will you marry me?" he asked hoarsely.

She pretended to be amazed; she pretended, as she had been brought up to pretend all her life; she even managed a blush, which Philip thought adorable, and when, with a little confiding gesture which would have been charming had it been less studied, she put her arms round his neck. Philip lost his head, and for a moment he was near, very near, to the gates of Eden.

"And so I can tell everyone we're engaged!" he said some time later when things had settled down a bit; and Kitty Arlington nodded and said she supposed so; and Philip kissed her again and said that he had never been so happy in his life, and he did not know what he had done to deserve her love; and then presently they went back to the lawns, and the man against whom Philip had played with Eva pounced upon them.

"Here you are, you rotter! What about your revenge! Miss Dennison has been looking for you everywhere, haven't you?" He appealed to Eva, who had followed him, but she turned away with a little laugh.

"I don't think Mr. Winterack cares to play again," she said quietly.

## CHAPTER II.

It was getting dusk when Philip got home. Long shadows lay about the house and garden and a faint, cooling breeze stirred the branches of the tall trees.

He was whistling a snatch of song under his breath, and he felt extraordinarily light-hearted.

He was an engaged man. To-morrow he was going up to London to buy the finest diamond ring . . .

"If you please, sir, the master would like to speak to you—he is in the library, sir."

Philip woke from his dreaming with a start.

"Oh, all right . . ."

He felt absurdly bashful as he crossed the hall and opened the library door. He wondered what they would say, this father and mother of his, who had both always been such sticklers for birth and breeding. Well, they could have no objection to Kitty on that score, at all events—her pedigree was longer than his own, in spite of the fact that her ancestors had been a somewhat shady and impecunious lot. She was a lady to her finger-tips, bless her! What a mistress she would make for the Highway House. His mother would be pleased, he was sure. He shut the door behind him with a little nervous slam.

"Baker said you wanted me," he began, then stopped. His father and mother were both in the room, and his mother . . . not crying, surely?

He took a quick step forward and stood beside her.

"What is it? What has happened? Mother . . ."

But it was his father who answered, his father who spoke in a voice broken by emotion and rough with feeling.

"It's ruination, I hil, that's what it is, my boy."

"Ruinatio!" The young man stared. "What on earth——" He tried to laugh. "Guv'nor, what are you talking about? Mother——"

"It's the truth, my boy. The old man had walked over to the window now, and stood staring into the garden with eyes that saw more acutely than ever before the beauties of this home which perhaps would soon be his no longer, and suddenly his enforced calm broke and he flung up his clenched hands with a groan.

"After all these years . . . nobody but a Winterdick has ever lived at the Highway House. . . ."

It was that cry which told Philip the deadly earnestness of it all; a sudden feeling of weakness came over him; he clenched his hand on the back of his mother's chair.

"Ruinatio!" It was an ugly word.

He stammered out that it was a mistake, of course it must be a mistake—there was a way of putting things right—it was too absurd—too unthinkable.

"It's your father's optimism that had ruined us," his mother said, passionately. "His absurd optimism and his confidence in anyone who chooses to put hair-brained schemes before him. I warned you not to listen to that

man, Lionel; you know I did—you know that I did, Phil!—and now what is the consequence?"

"What man? What are you talking about?" There was sharp irritation in Philip's voice; his nerves felt all on edge.

"Sinclair. . . . I begged your father not to have anything to do with him. I distrusted the man from the first—you remember the day he came, Phil?"

"Yes, yes"—Philip remembered it well, remembered that he, too, had shared his mother's dislike of the man—"go on; what has he got to do with it?"

His father turned.

"He was floating a company which he swore would make his fortune, and double mine—the thing look sound—I put every penny I could raise into it. I mortgaged the estate, and now. . . ." He broke on helplessly.

Philip dragged a chair forward and sat down, his brain was not working very clearly as yet.

"And the position is—what?" he asked after a moment.

Mrs. Winterdick broke out again.

"The position is that we are ruined—we shall have to sell the house, and go and live somewhere quite small and cheap. I—oh, I can't bear it," she sobbed. "Think of the disgrace."

Philip looked at his father.

"How long have you known this?" he asked. He was sorry for his father, desperately sorry—the gov'nor was such a sport, such a ripping fine sport, and he looked so crushed and beaten, even his voice sounded changed as he answered dearly—

"A long time, Phil—a long time."

"And you never told me?"

"I hoped things would improve—I was sure something might turn up. I thought disaster could be averted."

The same old fatal optimism! Philip remembered how often he had heard his mother say only half seriously that it would be the ruin of them all.

Sudden, passionate revolt surged through his heart; he brought his clenched fist down on the table.

"But there must be something to stop it—something that can be done. . . ."

His mother stopped crying. She looked up and across to where her husband stood, and there was a moment of silence fraught with meaning. Then she spoke:

"Are you going to tell him, Lionel, or shall I?"

The old man turned heavily.

"I will, my dear, of course. I will. . . ." He cleared his throat vigorously. "Phil, my boy. . ." he began,

then stopped, only to struggle on afresh. "I've always been a good father to you, Phil. I've given you everything you wanted, everything you asked for, and you're our only son—" He paused. "Our only son," he said again impressively.

"Yes . . ." Philip rose to his feet; he had not the least idea what was coming, but he felt that it was something that would matter greatly.

"Anything I can do . . . anything—" he added helplessly.

Yet in his heart he was asking himself what on earth he could do to stem the tide that seemed about to overwhelm them. He had never done a day's work in his life, and had never been taught a profession; he had romped through Eton and Oxford on his games, so to speak; he had rather liked admitting frankly that he was no good where brains were required, but if it was a question of muscle . . .

"There is something you can do," his father said. He kept his face averted as he spoke. "Something that will save us all—your mother and myself—and you too, Phil."

"Well?" There was a sharp note in the young man's voice.

"Well—" he father echoed, "there is Dennison. You know Dennison?"

"You're not suggesting that I should ask him for money?" Philip interrupted hotly. "A man you've always despised because he made his money out of trade. If that's it . . ."

"It's not it." The old man laughed ruefully. "If that were all, I could ask him myself—as a matter of fact . . ." He voice grew shamefaced. "I have asked him—already."

"Father!"

Mr. Winterdick rounded on him fiercely.

"It was for your sake, not my own—your sake and your mother's. Do you think I want to see you both ruined after all these years? Do you think I want to turn out of my home and die in a stuccoed villa?" The old man's voice rose passionately.

Philip looked away, somehow he could not bear it.

"Go on," he said in a muffled voice. "And what did—did Dennison say?" It hurt his pride that they should have come to this, that his father—his father! the most respected and first man in the county should have asked money from old Dennison, a man who was not properly educated, a man who boasted that he had once served in

his own small shop. . . . It was intolerable. "Go on," he said again. "What did he say—refused, of course."

"No . . . but there were conditions . . . conditions which only you, my boy, can fulfil."

There was a sort of desperate courage now in his father's voice. He came across to Philip, and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"I've been good to you, my boy," he said, almost humbly. "You'll not stand by and see me ruined and see your mother's heart broken?"

Philip gripped his father's hand.

"You know that anything I can do I will, and gladly. But I don't understand."

"It was Dennison's own condition, not mine. . . ." Mr. Winterdick cleared his throat vigorously. "You know what that class of man is, what he thinks of pedigree and blue blood, and an ancestral home, and so forth. . . . Only natural, I suppose, but . . ."

Philip made a gesture of intolerance.

"Yes, yes . . . but go on—go on. . . ." His nerves felt at snapping point. He could not think what it was that his father was driving at.

"Well, he says he will get me out of Sinclair's rotten concern, take over the shares—make everything as it was before I was fool enough to trust the man, if you . . . if you . . . if you will marry his daughter, Phil."

### CHAPTER III

FOR a moment there was unbroken silence in the dusky room; to Philip it seemed as if this were just some scene from a play, at which he was part of the audience, and not anyone whom it vitally concerned.

He looked at his mother—her face was raised now, and there was a world of strain and anxiety in her eyes as they met his; her hands were clasped in her lap, her whole being seemed to be praying of him, beseeching of him to do this thing—to save them while there was yet time.

She had always been so proud. It struck her son now with a sort of wonderment that she could be willing for him to buy back what they had lost at such a price; he supposed it showed that she must love the Highway House very much.

He looked at his father—the old man's head was bent, his hands gripped the back of a chair against which he was standing, and Philip noticed that his knuckles stood out white with the strain which he was putting upon them.

He looked past him and into the darkening garden. A bird was twittering drowsily in the silence and everything was so quiet and peaceful it seemed impossible that this tragedy had really come into his life.

He tried to speak, but his lips felt stiff; there was only one thought in his mind—Kitty!

She had no money, and now—as he had none—he dashed a hand across his eyes; money would not matter! She was not that sort of girl; she would stick to a fellow all the more because he was down on his luck.

“Phil, dear,” said his mother with a sob.

It was a sharp reminder of all he was asked to do—all for which they had appealed to him.

They knew nothing of Kitty and his love for her; they only asked him to save them, to save their home for them, and their name; they had no idea of the sacrifice they were demanding.

To marry Eva Dennison!—a girl he hardly knew—a girl to whom he had never given a second thought. To make her his wife and bring her to live here in his home; to be son-in-law to red-faced old Dennison—to pal up to her brothers . . . he set his teeth hard, oh, the thing was monstrous.

“Phil,” said his mother again. “Oh, Phil, for my sake!”

She got up and came over to where he stood, clasped her hands about his arm and bowed her face to them; he could feel her tears on his hand, feel how her whole body shook with sobs, and suddenly he knew that he could bear it no longer. He wrenched himself free—

“Oh, let me go, let me go—it’s impossible, quite impossible. . . .”

He rushed from the room and out into the garden; the cool air fanned his hot forehead; he walked up and down in the dusk, driven by tortuous thoughts.

Kitty! She was all that gnattered; how could he give her up! Why, it was only a few hours since he had told her he loved her, only a few hours since he had held her in his arms and kissed her; they were only just on the threshold of their happiness, and now they were asking him to shut the door upon it for ever.

He felt as if he could never rest again; away in the distance a clock chimed the hour—he saw his father turn on the light in the library, saw his fine old figure momentarily silhouetted against the light and he stood still for a moment to look at him.

He had always been so proud of his father—he would have done a great deal for the old man, but this—was asking too much!

He turned away and went out of the garden and down the road.

A desperate longing to see Kitty was upon him; a sort of blind terror seemed to be gripping his soul—he had got to lose her! Struggle against the thought as he might, at the back of his mind the conviction clung.

He had got to lose her—she would never be his wife—he would have to stand by and see some other, luckier man step in to his place, whilst he—

It was asking too much, it was not fair—he had a right to his happiness.

And yet he knew that his parents, too, had a right to expect something of him in return for all that they had lavished upon him. He had always had everything he wanted, they had showered love and money upon him; he had often felt that if ever the day came when he could repay even a little for all they had done he would do it so gladly; and yet here he was crying out like a coward, because that day had come.

He walked on more quickly. He had come to the bend in the road where he had met Kitty only that afternoon. He thought of the little smile in her eyes as she had looked up at him, thought of the touch of her hand on his arm—the soft yielding of her lips to his kisses.

Supposing he never kissed her again! Supposing that sweet chapter of his life were ended and closed for ever! Suppose—— Oh, what was the good of supposing—it only drove a man mad and made the world a mockery.

He tried to put all thoughts from him; he strode on till he reached the little country town.

The Arlingtons lived in an unpretentious house close to the church. Kitty had once said to him teasingly:

“You have to pass the Dennisons’ palatial residence to get to our modest abode! I wonder you care to come to see us.” And he had answered that he would walk to the ends of the earth to see her, no matter where she lived. He was remembering all these little sweet nothings now, with unutterable anguish.

In a moment he had reached the house, with its ivy-covered walls, and was standing out there in the quiet roadway, looking up at the lighted windows with his unhappy heart in his eyes.

Suffering was new to Philip Winterdick; he did not understand it; he fiercely resented it, because the foundations of his happiness that had seemed so secure were being undermined.

And as he stood there, half-afraid to go on to the house and ask for the girl he loved, the door opened and she came out. The house was old-fashioned and only a narrow



strip of garden divided it from the pathway, but she had reached the gate and was standing there in the dusky light before she saw him; then she caught her breath with a little cry and instinctively held out her hands.

"You, Phil!"

"Yes, my dear." His voice was broken. He took her hands, and, bending his head, kissed them again and again with frantic passion. Now he seemed so near losing her his love had suddenly assumed gigantic proportions. He was sure that no man had ever loved a woman as he loved Kitty Arlington—he was sure that his life was about to be ruined—all his hopes of future happiness blasted.

She tried to free herself. She drew away from him in faint alarm. She did not like such deep emotion—she preferred a rather distant way of love-making. There was a little frown between her blue eyes as she looked up at him, trying to read his face.

"Phil! what is the matter? What has happened?"

"Everything. I don't know how to tell you. Will you come out—or shall I come in? I couldn't rest till I had seen you . . . Kitty——" His voice broke though he tried hard to steady it. "Kitty, you do love me, don't you? It wasn't just play this afternoon? You do want to be my wife?"

She grew alarmed.

"Love you! Of course I do, Phil! You frighten me! What is the matter? . . . Oh dear!"

She began to cry—butterfly tears that were most effective.

Philip was all contrition instantly. He was a selfish brute. He hadn't meant to make her cry, he would sooner die than that she should shed a tear for him. He loved her so. There was nothing he would not do for her happiness.

He was so gentle, there was such tenderness in his voice, that she dried her eyes. She was curious to know what had happened. She would come out, she said.

Philip opened the gate. It was almost dark in the road now, and he held her hand in his as they walked slowly up and down.

"I don't know how to tell you. This afternoon I had not the least idea of it all. It was only when I got home—the gov'nor . . ."

She broke in—

"He doesn't want you to marry me. He doesn't think I'm good enough."

He laughed broken-heartedly.

"If it were only that! My darling, how could he ever think such a thing?"

"Then what is it! If it isn't that, what else can it be?"

There was a hint of impatience in her voice, and Phil saw with a feeling of despair that the truth would never even faintly occur to her. He supposed it would not occur to anyone who knew them—the Winterdicks' wealth was a by-word—they had always been rich—for generations they had been the wealthiest people in the county.

She tried to free her hand.

"Why don't you tell me You are unkind! You say you love me, and yet you frighten me like this. It it's anything I ought to know, why don't you tell me?"

And then he told her the plain, ugly truth as it had been told to him—that his father had speculated and lost in an hour or two the fortune that had been built up by generations. He spared himself nothing—he told her that he would be poor—that he had never earned a shilling in his life—that he would have to start from the bottom of the ladder and struggle to make his way up; that he would succeed—that he would do his utmost, if only she would help him. He only wanted her love, nothing else in the world counted. He knew he wasn't good enough for her, but he adored the ground she walked on—after all money wasn't everything—that people who lived in quite little houses on little incomes were often happier than kings—and all the time he felt himself a traitor to his mother, a traitor to the generous old gov'nor, who had never grudged him anything, who would have given him the very coat off his back.

And suddenly he broke off into despairing silence. He felt her hand fall away from his, and for an eternity she did not speak; then she said in a small, strangled voice:

"You must be mad. . . ."

Philip caught his breath hard.

"You must be mad," she said again. "What are you saying? That you are poor! That you have lost all your money!" She laughed. "It can't be true! How can people lose so much money in such a little time?"

"It's not a little time—my father has known for ever so long."

"And he never told you—let you go on in ignorance." There was nothing but cold anger in her voice.

"Kitty—for God's sake, if you ever loved me."

He tried to put his arm round her, but she repulsed him.

"It's not fair; you've cheated me. I've been poor all my life—too poor to want to marry a man who has no money."

He broke in desperately:—

"If you loved me at all. . . ."

"If I loved you it would make no difference. I can't

be poor—I hate poverty! It's ugly—horrid! Ugh! Phil, don't you understand? All my life it's been a struggle—I've never really had anything that I wanted."

"You mean you don't care for me enough to marry me?"

She evaded the question.

"Caring isn't anything when you haven't any money."

There was a long silence; then she turned.

"I must go back. I wish I had never come out. I wish I had never seen you."

There were tears in her voice now, tears of self-pity only, but they wrung his heart. He began to plead with her afresh—he would work as man had never worked before; he would lay down his life for her; he would make her the happiest woman in the world.

She gave a little contemptuous laugh.

"The happiest woman in the world—with one frock a year!"

She cried in earnest now, but they were tears of disappointment; she had been so pleased at her success in catching the most eligible man for miles around—she had made such plans for the future, and now they were all down in the dust—she could still be engaged to Philip Winterdick if she chose, but the engagement would be shorn of all its glory. She could never live at the Highway House—she could never have her own car; the tears fell faster; she was sobbing outright by the time they got back to the ivy-coloured house around which Philip had woven such wonderful dreams.

At the gate he made his last appeal.

"No one will ever love you better than I do, Kitty. And it's for all our lives, remember. . . ."

"I can't be poor," she sobbed. "And you'd hate it, too. You must marry someone with money, Phil. Oh, poor Phil! I'm sorry—but I can't, indeed I can't."

She tried to slip away, but he held her fast.

"And this is your last word?" he asked in a strangled voice. "If I go now I never come back; you understand that?"

"Yes," she whispered.

He bent and tried to see her face, but the dusk was too deep now.

"And you don't—care," he said in hoarse wonderment. He let her go, and stood there like a man turned to stone while she fled up the little garden to the house. He waited, and then he heard the sharp click of the front door as she shut it against him.

He had offered her of his best, and she had flung it back in his face because she couldn't bear to be poor!

He turned away and began to walk homeward. His step was as firm as ever and he held his head proudly erect, but the heart of him was breaking for the pretty dream that had gone so sadly awry.

## CHAPTER IV

THERE was someone else besides Philip Winterdick who had found it impossible to settle down to anything on the evening following the tennis party; when everybody had gone, Eva Dennison wandered restlessly about the garden in the dusk till one of her brothers found her and demanded to know what she had got the hump about.

Whatever people like Kitty Arlington and young Winterdick thought of Ralph Dennison's daughter, her own brothers adored her.

She was the eldest of the family, and, in the words in which the boys invariably expressed their admiration for her, she was a real sport.

On more occasions than they could remember she had stood between them and their father's anger; over and over again in the old days before wealth knocked at their door, Eva had looked after them like a mother, sewing on odd buttons and scraping pennies together for some small treat, working early and late to make life more bearable, and sacrificing herself in a thousand small ways.

Mrs. Dennison was a useless, fretful sort of person, who from the moment the necessity for economy ceased had her fingers manicured and firmly refused to use them again for anything more strenuous than fancy work.

She imagined that by so doing she was proving herself a suitable wife for a rich man; she spent most of her time now reclining on a couch in her too elaborate drawing-room, or taking short drives in the expensive car which was the terror of her soul.

She loathed motoring; she looked for accidents at every corner, but as the Winterdicks and everyone else who was anyone had a car and used it, she hid her fear and followed their example.

Only the chauffeur, perhaps, knew what a penalty the daily run was to his mistress or recognised the note of real agony in her voice as she besought him in a whisper to "Drive carefully, John."

"It's a shame to expect mother to go in the car," Eva said more than once to her father. "I'm sure she hates it."

"Hates it!" Ralph Dennison looked at his daughter with blank amazement in his shrewd eyes. "Hates it!" he echoed again. "Hates riding in a car that cost me nearly a thousand pounds?" He gave a self-satisfied laugh. "It's a better car than even Winterdick's," he said, complacently.

He took the Winterdicks as his standard. He copied them in every possible way. He even tried to wear suits like those which old Winterdick wore, regardless of the fact that what looked well on the tall, slim figure of the owner of the Highway House, looked absurd on his own portly proportions.

He had long since cherished a scheme in his ambitious mind by which his daughter was to marry Philip Winterdick, but that an opportunity would ever arise to make the way easy for him had never once entered into his calculations.

He had never cared particularly for Eva. He had wished all his family to be sons, but since they had left the suburban town where he had laboriously built up the foundations of his wealth, and come to live in Apsley, Eva had grown in importance.

He began to realise that she was pretty. He was proud that the Arlingtons had taken her up. He never minded what he gave her to spend on clothes.

"Buy what the other girls buy," he told her. "Buy clothes like those Miss Arlington wears, and you'll look as well as she does. Dash it all! Do you think I'm going to have my girl cut out by people like them?"

Eva flushed. She hated this ostentation and show. She was naturally a simple, unaffected girl. She knew quite well what Apsley and its leading people thought of her and her family, and she knew that the Winterdicks, courteous as they always were when they met, in their hearts looked down upon them.

That knowledge hurt intolerably. She envied Kitty Arlington bitterly because of the long line of ancestors she had to back her up.

Rogues and vagabonds they may have been. That did not matter. They were at least ancestors and blue-blooded, and she knew that to Philip and his parents they mattered for more than all her own wealth.

Eva had cared for Philip Winterdick from the first moment of their meeting. For her he was the one man in the world. Such things do happen sometimes in spite of omens.

"Not that he would ever look at me, I know," she told herself again and again.

But this afternoon, when he had so carelessly thrown

her over in order to be with Kitty Arlingt'n, she had felt as if she could bear it no longer, and when her brother came upon her wandering about the garden later in the evening there were very obvious signs of tears on her face.

He slipped an arm about her waist with a sort of embarrassment.

"What's up?" he demanded. "What have you got the hump about, Bonnie?"

Bonnie was the boys' nickname for her. Nobody knew quite how it had originated or why, but they never called her by any other name.

She tried to laugh.

"I haven't got the hump—of course I haven't. I'm tired, that's all."

"Well, then, you'd better come indoors," he advised. "Pater's been asking for you all the evening. I say,"—his voice changed to a sort of perplexity—"have you noticed how frightfully bucked with himself the pater's been looking lately?"

Eva shook her head.

"No. Has he? Perhaps he's made some more money." There was a touch of bitterness in her voice. What was the use of money? It could not buy the one thing in all the world that she wanted.

They turned back towards the house.

"How do you think things went off this afternoon, Peter?" she asked, with an attempt at her old cheeriness. "I played a rotten game, I know—did you notice?"

He shook his head.

"You can't always be on top of your form," he said, rather absently. "I say—Kitty Arlington's a stunner, isn't she?"

His sister's heart contracted a little; Peter was her favourite brother, and the whole-hearted enthusiasm in his voice hurt her somehow.

"She's very pretty," she said, with an effort.

She was thinking of the expression of Philip Winterdick's eyes as he came back across the lawn with Kitty at his side.

"She's engaged to Mr. Winterdick, isn't she?" she asked, carelessly.

Peter shrugged his shoulders.

"Couldn't say, I'm sure," he said, laconically. "She doesn't wear a ring if she is." There was a little pause. "Does she?" he asked, a trifle anxiously.

Eva looked up quickly; something in his voice touched her with a sort of apprehension.

Surely Peter . . . but Peter was such a boy—only just turned two-and-twenty; she tried to shake the thought aside.

"Well, she won't, if she doesn't now," she said decidedly. "It's one of those things that are . . . well—in the air, you know."

Peter did not answer; they had reached the house, and he left her at the door. Eva went on to her father's room; the "study," he called it, though he never did anything more arduous in its book-lined precincts than read the *Financial Times*. She put her head round the half-closed door.

"Do you want me, father?"

Mr. Dennison was standing back to the mantelshelf; a fat cigar between his lips, and a great expanse of white waistcoat showing beneath his dinner jacket.

"Come in, my dear—come in," he said affably. "I wondered where you were. Been in the garden?"

"Yes." She was puzzled by his manner; she looked at him curiously.

Mr. Dennison hummed and hawed; he was a trifle afraid of his daughter; he cleared his throat vigorously.

"I've been suggesting to your mother," he said at last, "that we ought to ask the Winterdicks to dinner."

Eva flushed crimson.

"Ask them to dinner!" she echoed. "Why, father, they've never asked us! They've never even properly called—and it was their place to call."

He frowned.

"That's an absurd idea that's gone out of fashion," he said emphatically. "People don't 'call' as they used to—I know it for a fact! Besides . . . I like the Winterdicks."

She laughed ruefully.

"I'm afraid they don't like us," she said. "And besides—we can't do it, father—I don't believe they'd come if we did."

"Tut, tut!" He was getting annoyed now. "Allow me to be the best judge of that, my dear. Old Winterdick was here yesterday morning, and he made himself most agreeable—in fact, he—er . . . well, he gave me to understand that he hoped we should all be nice and jolly together—neighbourly; in fact, you know . . ." He stopped; he looked anxiously at his daughter. "I thought you liked young Winterdick," he broke out with sudden exasperation.

Eva clenched her hands in her lap to hide their sudden trembling. "Like him! When we've only met half-a-dozen times," she said as carelessly as she could.

"Half-a-dozen times!" he echoed scornfully. "Why, I proposed to your mother the second time I ever saw her. Hasn't she ever told you? It was Whit Monday, and I

... " He stopped and cleared his throat to hide his embarrassment. The memory of that Writ Monday did not somehow seem to fit in to the present elaborate picture. " Anyway, I mean to ask them," he hurried on. " So you'd better talk to your mother about it."

He turned away as if to intimate that the discussion was at an end, and Eva left him.

Her cheeks were hot and flushed. How on earth could they do this thing? She could not understand her father at all. Though she was as fond of him as he would allow her to be, she knew that compared with Philip's father he was common and uneducated; she could well imagine what it would mean if this invitation were sent.

" They would refuse—of course, they would," she told herself.

It had hurt her because Mrs. Winterdick had not called on her mother; she knew that Mrs. Winterdick was very exclusive, and she knew, too, that it would only be courting disaster to make such a blunder as to ask them to dinner.

She laughed a little to herself as she went out into the garden again.

" Poor father!" she thought. " If only he wouldn't be in such a hurry."

She wandered round to the front of the house, and down the long carriage drive to the gate.

It was almost dark, but there was a faint light in the sky as if a moon were climbing aloft behind the slowly moving clouds.

The gate was fastened back, and Eva went out into the road.

Everything was very still; there seemed nobody about.

She looked down the road towards the Arlington's house. She had so often looked towards it at night and wondered how often Philip Winterdick found his way there. She wondered if perhaps he was there now—if he had gone home with Kitty after the tennis party and stayed for the evening.

Then she thought of Peter's elaborately indifferent questioning of a few moments since, and the faint anxiety stirred again in her heart.

" Had Kitty been flirting with him, boy as he was! Oh, surely not! She was so heartless; such a butterfly! Not nearly good enough to win his affections, and, besides. . . there was Philip!

" It's all nonsense—it's just my silly imagination," she told herself. " Why, Peter's only a boy still!"

She looked up at the sky. A little crescent moon had just sailed over a dark bank of clouds, and seemed to be peeping down at her.



"A new moon! I ought to wish!"

And almost as the thought floated into her mind another followed quickly, forming itself into words before she was really aware of its existence.

"If only he might love me!"

The sound of her own voice startled her, and she looked round guiltily, afraid lest someone should have heard.

She had been thinking of Philip. When was she not thinking of him? And to-night more than ever before his love seemed to be the one thing in all the world worth wishing for.

She raised her face to the sky and involuntarily stretched her arms to the little shining crescent.

"If only he might love me," she said again, softly. "Little Man in the Moon, if it's true that you can grant wishes, grant mine! And let him love me—some day!"

"You look like a priestess praying to the moon," said a voice at her elbow, and, turning, Eva saw Philip Winterdick standing beside her. He had not changed from his tennis flannels, and the white canvas shoes which he still wore had deadened the sound of his footsteps as he came along the road.

He would have avoided Eva had he thought it possible; he was not in the mood to speak to anyone; he was still throbbing with wounded pride at the way in which Kitty Arlington had dismissed him; for the moment at least no other woman existed for him, but a faint wonderment did pass through his mind as he saw the sudden radiance in this girl's face as she turned to him.

There was a little silence, then she said rather breathlessly:

"I never heard you coming up the road."

"No"—he glanced down at his flannels almost apologetically—"I haven't bothered to change—it's so hot, and . . ." He stopped, his eyes wandering past her to the direction of the Arlington's house, from which he had just come; then, with an effort, he turned to her again.

"You were moon-worshipping!"

She laughed.

"Not exactly. I was just wondering if the old idea about wishing when you see a new moon is true!"

He smiled faintly.

"What did you wish for?" He was not really interested, but it seemed the obvious thing to inquire.

She shook her head.

"If I were to tell you it wouldn't come true."

His moody eyes scanned her face.

"I should not have thought you were superstitious," he said. "Nor sentimental," he added in his mind.

He had always looked upon Eva Dennison as a matter-of-fact sort of person; he had only hitherto seen her when she was throwing herself heart and soul into a game; it rather surprised him to have found her gazing at the moon.

"I think everybody is superstitious sometimes," she said rather gravely. Then she jerked her head with a queer little gesture of dismissal. "Were you coming to see us?" she asked.

She knew quite well that he was not.

He hesitated.

"It's rather late, isn't it?" he said evasively.

The last hour had seemed an eternity to him; as he looked at Eva he thought of his father's words in the library that evening, and a hot flush crept into his face.

This girl as his wife! He wondered what she would say if he told her; if she would feel as he did, the utter impossibility of it all!

He took a cigarette from his pocket and lit it.

In the sudden flare made by the match Eva looked at him with wistful eyes.

She had not wanted to love him; it had just somehow happened, without any design on her part; and it struck her as being absurd as well as pathetic that while he meant so much to her she should be nothing at all to him.

He was so much everything she had always admired in a man.

There was nothing of a hero about him really; he was just an ordinary, healthy, rather selfish person; kind-hearted and thoroughly spoilt, and just now perfectly convinced that his whole life had been ruined by Kitty Arlington.

The glare of the match showed the hardness of his eyes, and a sort of drawn constraint in his brown face before it flickered out and left them once more in the darkness of the summer night.

"He doesn't look happy," Eva Dennison thought quickly. There was a little silence.

"When are we going to have our revenge?" Philip asked.

He had been casting round in his mind for something to say, and this seemed a happy inspiration.

"I played a rotten game this afternoon; I hope you have forgiven me?"

"I played badly, too, but I should like to beat them some time if we can."

He blew a cloud of smoke into the darkness.

"Well, why not to-morrow?"

At the back of his mind there was the desire to make Kitty jealous. More than once she had pretended to be

piqued with him for playing so much with Eva for a parter, and a desperate hope grew in his heart as he made his suggestion.

Perhaps after all she really cared for him; of course, it must have come as a shock to her,—next time they met she would have had time to think it over and realise what it really meant to them both.

"I can come to-morrow—if I may," he said again. Or won't you come to our place this time? I am sure my mother will be delighted to see you."

Eva's face flamed.

"Oh, I think you had better come to us," she said, hurriedly. "I'll write to Madge and Mr. Foster, or go and see them in the morning."

Something in her voice arrested him.

"You mean that you don't care to come to us?" he said, with a touch of offence.

Eva's pride was aroused; she answered almost before she was aware of it.

"I mean that I don't think your mother would care for me to come."

Philip made an involuntary exclamation, but she went on breathlessly:

"Oh, please don't say anything, Mr. Winterdick. I know your people are quite different to mine. I know just what we are thought of in Apsley. But, after all"—she drew a hard breath—"even if we did make our money out of trade, I have my pride, too, you know."

He broke in agitatedly:

"Miss Dennison—I give you my word of honour. . . ."

She laughed scornfully.

"Oh, it doesn't matter—please don't let us talk about it any more; you can't alter facts. And now, I think it's time I went in."

She made a movement to pass him, but he stopped her.

"I'm not going to let you go like this," he said decidedly. "You've got to have this out with me. You accuse us of being snobs—"

Eva laughed merrily.

"I never used the word—I never even thought it."

"It's the same thing," he protested impatiently. "You talk about your father having made his money out of trade! Well—mine didn't make his at all—it's all been made for him—years ago—and just handed on, as I suppose some day it will be handed on to me; at least—"

He stopped. For the moment he had forgotten the tragic thing that had happened only a few hours ago; then he shrugged his shoulders.

"So, you see, it's an absurd argument," he went on

lightly. "As a matter of fact, your guv'nor scores over mine as it's always more credit to a man to rake his money than to have it given to him." So please don't talk rubbish like that. As to my mother—she was only speaking about you this evening when I got home; I give you my word she was, and I assure you that she will be delighted if you'll come and play at our place to-morrow. I'll get hold of Foster in the morning, and ring up Madge Ackland, and we'll have a ripping four. What time will you come?"

There was a sort of confidence in his voice; she saw that he took it for granted that she would not refuse, and it hurt her.

"I'd much rather you came to us," she protested. "I would really much rather. . . ." And then with sudden impulse she broke out passionately: "It's kind of you to talk like this—I know you mean to be kind. But it's no use. Only just now, before I came out here, my father was saying that he wanted to ask your people to dinner. I'm not ashamed of my father, Mr. Winterdick—I'm fond of him, but I just tell you this to make you see what a real difference there is between us. You know it's not the thing for us to ask you to dinner—your mother hasn't called on my mother. I hate all this silly convention, but people do it, and if we want to live here I suppose we shall have to do it, too, or be cut."

"My mother will call to-morrow—I'll ask her," he blurted out.

Eva smiled and shook her head.

"The fact of your having to ask her only proves what I say." She held out her hand. "Good-night, Mr. Winterdick, and I hope I haven't made you angry."

"But you're not going yet," he protested. "What about our tennis—you said you were dying to beat Foster and Madge—"

"So I am—but on our own court!"

Philip frowned in the darkness.

"I have invited you to come to the Highway House."

"And I have refused," she retorted lightly.

"Very well—two can play at that game," he said with a sudden show of temper. "So we'll call the game off. Good-night, Miss Dennison."

He stalked off with as much dignity as he could summon.

It was preposterous, he told himself angrily. First she called him a snob and then she gave herself airs and refused his overtures. A nice sort of wife she would make for a man! He stopped dead in the road.

This was hardly the way to do as his parents had begged of him! He thought of his father—that pathetically

broken air about him—and he thought of his mother's tears, and he wore softly under his breath.

What a position for a man to be in! Degrading! Impossible!

And Kitty . . . it was the thought of Kitty that drove him back. Kitty cared nothing for him or his unhappiness, and if he could not have the woman he wanted he might just as well have the second best. He hurriedly retraced his steps.

"Miss Dennison."

Eva was half-way up the drive, but she heard his voice, and her heart gave a traitorous little thump.

But she did not turn or slacken her pace.

Philip broke into a run and overtook her.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'm beastly sorry. I'll be delighted to come to-morrow—if you'll have me."

She put her hand in his readily.

"Four o'clock, then," she said. "And don't be late. Good-night."

"Good-night—and—Miss Dennison!"

"Yes!"

They were some steps apart now.

"I hope the old man in the moon grants the wish," said Philip Winterdick.

There was a little silence.

"So do I," said Eva tremulously.

## CHAPTER V

"TENNIS again!" said Peter Dennison disgustedly. He had encountered his sister on the stairs the following afternoon, and he paused a step below her and looked her up and down with pretended disapproval.

"Who is coming to-day, then?"

Eva was intent on fastening the cuff of her white blouse.

"Only Madge and Mr. Foster," she said airily.

"Only three of you!—you can't play three!" he protested.

She raised her eyes for a moment and dropped them again quickly.

"There's Mr. Winterdick, too," she said.

"Winterdick!" A little gleam shot into the boy's eyes.

"Oh, then, I suppose Miss Arlington will be here as well."

"Indeed she won't, then," said Eva sharply. "She doesn't play, and so I didn't ask her. . . She hates games."

"She could sit under the trees and amuse me," Peter said. "I like looking at her—she's like a picture." He seemed conscious all at once of his sister's silence; he tweaked her sleeve.

"What's up, Bonnie?"

"Nothing." She pulled away from him almost angrily. "You men are all the same," she said impetuously. "It's always a pretty face that attracts you—nothing else."

She passed him and went down into the hall.

It was a quarter to four—the others would be here at any moment now, but somehow that little reference to Kitty had taken away her eager anticipation of the game.

What was the use of this afternoon with Philip? He cared nothing for her. She was all very well to play tennis with for an hour—but for anything more . . . She stifled a sigh and went on into the garden.

Her father was there walking up and down admiring his roses and, as usual, smoking a fat cigar.

He looked at his daughter's trim figure complacently.

"Tennis again! Bless me! How can you play in this sun?" He flicked some cigar ash from his coat. "And who is coming to-day?" he asked.

"Madge and Mr. Foster—and Mr. Winterdick."

"Winterdick!" He sounded pleased. "Nice young fellow—I like him. You ought to go to their place and play, my dear."

Eva's eyes gleamed.

"He asked me to go to-day, and I refused," she said coolly.

Mr. Dennison dropped his cigar to the gravel path and forgot to pick it up while he stared at his daughter.

"You refused!—why in the world . . ."

She met his angry eyes steadily.

"Because I'm not going to be patronised, father," she said determinedly. "If they want me to go there they can ask me properly—not send a sort of by-the-way invitation like that . . ."

Last night, when Philip had left her, she had almost wished that she had consented to go to the Highway House.

She would love to have gone—to have seen his home

"People would only have said that I am ruining after him if I had gone," she told herself, as she stood in the sunshine beneath her father's angry eyes.

"I'm blessed if I know what's coming to you," he growled. "You ought to be thankful for all I've done for you. You ought to be thankful for being here instead of slaving for your living as your mother did when she was your age. . . . You ought . . ." He stopped as a

motor-horn sounded at the gate and a big car turned gracefully up the drive.

"Bless my soul——" He grabbed at the fallen cigar, his face flushed and embarrassed. "Who is it, girl? It looks like the Winterdick's car . . ." His voice was absurdly agitated.

"It's Mrs. Winterdick," Eva said slowly. She was rather pale and there was a little fierce light in her eyes.

In spite of her determination Philip had scored off her this time; he had kept his word and sent his mother to call.

## CHAPTER VI

PHILIP threw himself full length on the grass at Eva Dennison's feet and looked up at her with admiration in his eyes.

"By Jove, you played a ripping game!" he said.

Eva laughed.

"I meant to win," she said.

Winterdick chuckled.

"It was a win, too! Poor old Foster—mad as a batter, wasn't he?" He rolled over, getting a little closer to her. "You and I ought to go in for the August tournament, you know," he said, eagerly. "There isn't a pair for miles that could beat us if we made up our minds to win."

Eva made a little grimace.

"I hate tournaments, and, besides——"

He finished the sentence for her.

"You mean that you don't want me for a partner."

"I never said so."

"No, but that's what you meant. You've been sort of stand-offish all the afternoon. What have I done, Miss Dennison?"

She plucked nervously at the cool grass.

"You know quite well what you've done," she said; she met his eyes steadily as she spoke.

Winterdick coloured without knowing why.

"You mean——" he asked.

"I mean that what I said to you last night was said in confidence, and I think it was the meanest thing you could have done to have gone home and asked your mother to call here."

He sat up with sudden energy.

"I never asked her to call," he said excitedly. "I swear by all—Miss Dennison, if you don't believe me, I'll bring the mater here and ask her in front of them all. I

never said a word to her—she left the house before I did this afternoon, and I was more amazed than you were when I got here and saw her . . . at least . . .” He floundered helplessly, realising that he had only made things worse.

Eva laughed, but there was a trace of tears in her voice.

She wondered why it was that the whole thing made her feel so humiliated; she supposed it was because she thought so much of Philip. She looked across to where his mother was sitting with Mrs. Dennison. Eva heard her mother’s affected little laugh—the laugh she had only cultivated since they came to Apsley.

“You don’t believe me,” said Philip darkly.

Her eyes came back to his flushed face.

“I do—of course, I do, if you say so. Oh!” she broke out impatiently, “I wish we didn’t always get on these silly arguments. After all, what does it matter? It’s kind of your mother to come. . .” But she raised her chin a dignified inch.

Philip ran his fingers through his hair.

“You women are the rummiest lot, he said with a sort of anger. “First you want a thing, and then you don’t . . . first——” He broke off and struck by his sudden silence Eva looked down at him.

His eyes were fixed on two people coming across the grass.

Eva’s eyes followed the direction of his, and then she sat quite still, her hands clutching the handle of her racquet.

Kitty and Peter!

Sudden anger burned in her heart. This was a put-up thing, of course, she told herself; Philip had let Kitty know that he would be here, and Kitty had come purposely.

She rose stiffly and went to meet them; Philip had risen, too, but he did not come forward.

“Poor dear! how hot you look!” Miss Arlington said commiseratingly as she shook hands with Eva. She looked provokingly dainty and cool herself.

“I hope you don’t mind my coming in like this. I met your brother just outside, and he positively dragged me in. . .” She glanced at Philip. “Good afternoon!” she said composedly.

Philip answered the greeting coolly, though his heart was racing.

He hated to see her there with Peter; hated the little air of devotion with which the boy followed her round; he was unutterably relieved when Foster called from under the trees that tea was ready; he walked with Eva to where her mother and his were sitting; he handed cups and cake, and talked and laughed, and all the time, he



hardly knew what he was doing; he felt that in a moment he should have to make a scene—to throw something at Peter, who had never left Kitty's side—to do something, anything, to give vent to the passionate jealousy in his heart.

It seemed an eternity till his mother rose to go; she looked at her son smilingly.

"You won't be coming yet, Phil, I suppose." She turned to Eva. "I wonder if you will come to us on Saturday, Miss Dennison," she said in her soft, well-bred voice. "We are having just a few friends for tennis—I shall be delighted if you will join us."

"Of course, she will," Philip struck in; his voice sounded a little high and excited. "Miss Dennison and I are going in for the Apsley Tournament together—challenge the world sort of thing, don't you know!"

He laughed, and looked at Eva with reckless eyes. "I'll come over and fetch you," he said. "You don't want to get hot before we start playing. What time? Four o'clock? Oh, that's too late—I shall come at three."

He went on talking at random, and all the time his heart was with Kitty Arlington and the boy at her side, and he was suffering—suffering intolerably.

Eva walked across the garden with Mrs. Winterdick to where the car was waiting at the front door.

"I am so glad to have met your mother," Mrs. Winterdick said. "I hope we shall be great friends."

But—"An appalling woman! Appalling!" was her thought as she drove away. She felt on the verge of tears; she stared stonily before her till she reached the Highway House. "What a family for Phil to marry into—poor Phil! But the girl . . . After all, she seemed nice."

She would have been amazed if she could have known the thoughts in Eva's heart as she went slowly back to rejoin the others.

"She hated us all—I know she hated us," she was telling herself passionately. "I wish she had never come."

Kitty rose to go as she rejoined them. She was toying with a rose she had been wearing; perhaps it was intentionally that she dropped it at Peter's feet.

He stooped awkwardly and grabbed it up.

Kitty smiled into his embarrassed face serenely.

"Are you going to see me home, Mr. Dennison? Yes, of course, I shall be pleased. Good-bye, dear"—this last to Eva. "Good-bye, dear Mrs. Dennison. Good-bye, Mr. Winterdick."

There was a little additional note of sweetness in her voice as she looked at Philip.

Eva watched her crossing the lawn with Peter, and her

heart swelled with anger. Had she quarrelled with Philip and was this her unworthy revenge—to flirt with a boy who was too young and unsophisticated to take her at her real value?

Philip was talking animatedly to Madge Ackland. He looked very much the same as usual, she thought, and a little throb of hope went through her.

Perhaps he did not really care for Kitty; perhaps she had imagined more than half the devotion she thought he had shown. She went over to him.

“Are we going to play again?”

He answered at once:

“Of course, we are—I’m only waiting for you. Come along, Foster; don’t be lazy.” He prodded Foster with his foot as he lay sprawled on the grass. “Get up, you lazy bouncer.”

They were halfway through a long set when suddenly Winterdick stopped. He looked at Eva.

“I can’t go on—I’m dead-beat! Do you mind if we stop?”

He stammered a little as he spoke; his lips looked pale.

Eva was all concern.

“Of course, we’ll stop. I dare say it’s the sun. It has been hot.” She stooped and began to collect the balls. She was afraid that he should see in her eyes how anxious she was for him. She told Foster and his partner that it was she who had given in.

“My head aches—you don’t mind, do you? We’ll finish another day.”

Philip said nothing; he had thrown down his racquet and was getting into a coat.

He despised himself for his weakness, but he felt he could keep up this farce no longer.

Since Kitty left the garden his whole being had seemed centred on the gate, watching for Peter’s return.

Peter was only a boy to Eva, because she had lived with him all her life and could not realise that he had grown up; but he was no boy to Philip Winterdick, and he already saw in him a rival—a man with the advantage of wealth, whilst he . . . what had he now to offer any woman?

He made his farewells hastily and left; he went off down the road at a tremendous pace. This thing had got to be settled once and for all to-night.

He had thought himself strong enough to play the game of indifference, but now he knew it to be impossible.

He went home and changed, and was leaving the house again when the dinner gong sounded.

Mrs. Winterdick came across the hall.

“Phil! You’re not going without your dinner.”

"I don't want any. It's too hot to eat anything; I . . . oh, very well, mother."

He sat at the table in durance vile; he knew that his parents were watching him closely, that they were wondering, hoping, waiting for him to say something.

The silence got on his nerves; he blurted out:

"Well, mother, what do you think of the Dennisons?"

Across the table his parents exchanged meaning glances.

"I was agreeably surprised," Mrs. Winterdick said then.

"I am sure I shall like them immensely."

Philip laughed.

"You didn't look as if you were enjoying yourself very much," he said grimly.

"Phil!"

He broke out angrily:

"Well, what's the use of pretending? You know you were thinking all the time you were there that Mrs. Dennison and the old man are impossible. So they are, I know, from your point of view. . . ." He laughed wretchedly; he looked at his mother. "Well, do you still want Eva for a daughter-in-law?"

The tears welled into his mother's eyes, and she could not answer; his father cleared his throat vigorously.

"My dear Philip, that is hardly the tone of voice in which to speak to your mother. As our only son. . . ."

Philip pushed his chair back so violently that he knocked it over; he flung his napkin down on the table.

"Let's be honest with each other at all events," he said savagely. "I don't care a damn for the girl, and you hate the sight of her people. They set you on edge with their show of wealth, only you won't admit it because you want them to pull us out of the mud and make it possible for us to stay on here. It's a low-down, rotten game, but . . . oh, I beg your pardon, mother—I spoke like a cad—I . . ."

He looked at Mrs. Winterdick: she was sobbing quietly; he made a step towards her with hand outstretched, then the utter futility of it all struck him. The memory of Kitty as she had walked away, looking up at Peter Dennison came back to him and almost drove him mad; he turned on his heel and strode out of the room.

Out of the room and out of the house, and down to the village. Kitty! Kitty! Kitty! . . . the summer evening seemed full of her name and the sound of her laugh.

She was off with the old love already, and on with the new!

She had laughed at Peter scores of times when she had been with Philip; she had called him clumsy and gauche; she had made fun of his habit of blushing—she had mimicked his manners—and yet she was not above playing

up to him because of the money which would some day be his.

Philip had rather liked Peter, but now he felt that he hated him.

To cut him out—a mere boy—the son of a——. He checked that thought, ashamed of it. He threw back his head and drew a long breath.

It was not all over yet; he had not lost her yet.

The maid who answered his ring at the Arlingtons' stared at young Winterdick's white face.

Yes, Miss Kitty was in, she was sure, she said hurriedly. Would he please wait in the drawing-room. Miss Kitty was in the garden.

"I'll go and find her," said Philip.

He went round the house and round the belt of bushes that screened the garden from the road.

It was an old-fashioned garden, not very big, but there were lavender bushes and old-world roses and a sort of picturesque wildness about it which Philip had always infinitely preferred to the immaculate grounds which old Dennison had had laid out with such pride.

The evening air was scented with lavender now, and, as young Winterdick went on, he suddenly heard Kitty's laugh.

Her dear, pretty laugh! Bless her! His angry heart felt as if a gentle hand had been for a moment laid on its soreness. It was all just a bad dream, this last wretched day. He rounded the hedge and suddenly stopped; his feet seemed rooted to the ground.

Kitty was there, half-lying, half-sitting in a hammock, one little foot swinging tantalisingly a few inches from the ground, her head thrown back against a blue cushion, and her eyes looking up with laughing invitation into Peter Dennison's face.

The evening was so still that every word she spoke clearly reached the man who watched them.

"Very well, then—I dare you!" she said provokingly.

There was a second's hesitancy; then Peter Dennison stooped with a determination in which there was nothing boyish, and kissed her lips.

## CHAPTER VII

FOR one heart-broken moment Philip Winterdick saw the world red. He never knew what restrained him from rushing forward; for a little space everything was unreal and confused, and when the mists cleared away he found

himself out of the garden and walking blindly away down the road.

Only yesterday she had told him she loved him and wanted to be his wife! And to-day she was fooling with another man and letting him kiss her.

Young Winterdick laughed; laughed aloud to the sunset sky and the glorious evening.

What a fool he had been.

He walked miles and miles before he got home. He was footsore and worn out when at last he let himself into the silent house.

A clock chimed in the hall as he closed the door behind him and put up the chain. He counted the strokes mechanically—one! two!—two o'clock! and all these hours he had been walking the roads.

He climbed the stairs wearily and threw himself, dressed as he was, on the bed and fell into a heavy sleep.

It was his first glimpse of trouble and disappointment; and, like people to whom life has been easy and sunny, he took it badly.

He looked at his reflection grimly as he shaved in the morning.

"Never again, my boy!" he promised himself. "We'll have a better reason than love next time."

He went down to breakfast and bade his father good morning. If he did not eat very much, he made a great pretence of a hearty meal, which completely deceived the old man.

Only when they had both finished, his father cleared his throat and delivered himself of a speech which he had had stored up in his mind since last night.

"Phil, my boy—you—er—upset your mother considerably last night."

Philip looked his father squarely in the face.

"Yes, I know," he said. "I'm sorry, I'll make it up to her to-day."

He pushed back his chair and rose; the old man rose too.

"Philip," he began, and then stopped. "Phil," he said again brokenly, "my boy—if it isn't for your happiness . . . I'd rather be ruined a thousand times over than drive you to do anything we might all of us be sorry for in the future."

Philip stood quite still, staring out of the window.

"I've been thinking," his father went on. "It never occurred to me before; but you must know so many girls, my boy—pretty girls, too—whom perhaps . . . if there is anybody else you care for, Phil." He blundered helplessly.

"There isn't anybody," said his son.

The old man gave a gasp of relief and held out his hand.

"Then it's all right—it's all right, isn't it—eh!"

"Quite all right," said Philip.

He gripped his father's hand, then let it go, and walked out of the room.

Kitty was not worth loving; his heart quivered as he planted that fact firmly in his brain, but he took a hard grip of himself instantly. She was not worth loving—he had done with her.

He deliberately thought of Eva Dennison. She had treated him fairly and squarely ever since he first met her; he was glad now to remember her frankness with him the night when he found her looking at the moon.

She did not care for him, of course—he had no right to expect it when he did not care for her—but at least they would get on well together; in a vague sort of way it seemed to him that life with her would evolve itself into a sort of eternal tennis match in which she would capably partner him.

Anyhow, he meant to ask her to marry him. She might refuse, of course!—for the smallest fraction of a second he hoped that she would—but he sternly brought himself to book again.

They would be married at once. There was nothing to wait for. He would let Kitty see that he . . . he pulled himself up sharply.

He did not intend to think of Kitty. And yet . . . yet . . . those moments in the Dennisons' rose-garden had been very sweet; in a bruised imagination he could still feel the soft touch of her lips on his.

He wandered about the house and grounds all the morning. He deliberately tried to imagine how he would feel if he knew that to-morrow, or the next day, or the day after, that, he had got to walk out of it and never return; how he would feel if he saw someone else living there. He knew he would feel pretty sick.

He tried to picture himself trying to make an income for himself, perhaps chained to an office stool all day and coming home cross and tired every night of his life to a suburban home. It was not in the least probable that he would ever do such a thing—he was the kind of man to clear off abroad first and rough it there—but it helped somehow to conjure these pathetic pictures of what might happen to him if Eva Dennison refused to marry him.

He thought of his father and mother, left to eke out the rest of their lives on a small and insufficient income; of his mother with perhaps only one servant to help her, and to his inexperience that seemed a terrible thing. How could one possibly be even moderately happy without

luxury and the thousand and one things to which she had been accustomed all her life!

He knew now what a fool he had been to imagine that a girl like Kitty would ever consent to marry him with such a prospect in store for her.

The Arlingtons were poor, but only with comparative poverty, and the whole family threw every effort they possessed into the somewhat doubtful task of "keeping up appearances."

They might not pay their bills regularly, but they kept two or three smart maids; there might be whispers of moneylenders and other unpleasantnesses, but Kitty was always one of the best-dressed women wherever she went.

So Philip Winterdick argued with himself for the whole morning.

He remembered grimly how once, during his 'Varsity days, he had stayed up all night with a friend, trying to dissuade him from marriage with a rich widow ten years his senior, but a woman whose fat money-bags would have helped that friend out of a horribly tight corner.

"You'll regret it for the rest of your life if you do it, old man," Philip had said over and over again. "Some day the right woman will come along, and then . . ."

Oh, he had been very eloquent! He smiled grimly now, remembering how at last he had gained his point. Fielding had not married the rich widow, and he had faced the music like a man, been sent down and had cleared off abroad.

Philip had heard from him only a week ago, telling him that the farm was paying at last, and that the best girl in the world had turned up and was going to put a shoulder to the wheel along with him. "And it's you I have to thank for it," so he wrote in happy eloquence. "Supposing I'd made a fool of myself five years ago . . ."

Young Winterdick wondered if he stood now in a similar position to that once occupied by Fielding.

Eva was not a rich widow ten years his senior, certainly; she was a young girl and a charming one, so no doubt many men would say—but he did not love her, and did not want to marry her, and that was all there was to it.

On the other hand, there were his mother and father to be considered; they had been so thundering good to him, and he was their only son . . .

And it wasn't as if Kitty cared!

He drew a long breath. If she had, he would have risked everything and stalked out of the Highway House with his head in the air, a happy beggar; but as it was . . . Young Winterdick walked home to lunch.

"I'll ask her if she'll have me," he told himself. "I'll go over to-day and ask her if she'll have me . . ."

But it was nearly five o'clock in the afternoon before he could screw up his courage sufficiently to go to the Dennisons', and even then he walked the whole way instead of taking the car.

There was no desperate hurry. He had got all the rest of his life to spend with her, so half an hour or so could make no difference.

In the drive he met Peter, who passed him hurriedly with a rather self-conscious nod.

"Bonnie's in the garden with the boys," he said. "Go round, will you? They're picking plums, I believe."

Philip walked on slowly; he knew quite well where Peter was going, and he could not quite control the spasm of jealousy in his heart. So many times he had made his way to Kitty with just the same joyous anticipation.

One of the younger Dennison boys overtook him as he crossed the lawn.

"Bonnie's up in the tree picking the plums," he said. "She's going to make jam. Mother's wild, because she says the cook ought to do it, but Bonnie won't let her. She always made it before we came here, you know."

"Did she?" A ghost of a smile crept into Philip's eyes; he liked Eva for her conservative determination. "Why do you call her Bonnie?" he asked.

The boy laughed.

"Don't know . . . we always have . . . there she is, look!"

They had reached the fruit garden now, and Philip saw a ladder planted against the trunk of one of the largest trees; saw, too, a pair of feet on the top rung and heard voices somewhere up above in the laden branches.

He went forward a step.

"Can I be of any assistance?" he asked.

There was a little laugh of consternation, then the dainty feet came down a couple of rungs and Eva peered at him from amongst the leaves.

"You! And I'm not fit to be seen. Look out, I'll come down."

She scrambled down quickly, jumping the last couple of feet, and landed beside Philip.

Her face was flushed and her hair disordered; the sleeves of her cotton frock were rolled up to the elbow and her hands were stained with the bark of the branches.

"We're gathering plums," she said. "I'm going to make jam."

There was a note of defiance in her voice, though she laughed.



"I suppose he's thinking what a sight I look," she thought helplessly.

"Well, I suppose I can help, can't I?" he said. "Or does it take brains to pick plums?"

He took off his coat as he spoke and went up the ladder. He discovered the youngest Dennison boy up amongst the branches.

"Want any help?" he asked cheerily.

He was beginning to enjoy himself; it was a long time since he had done anything like this. He picked away manfully till the tree was almost empty.

"I think you might come down now, you two," Eva said presently from the ground below. Philip Winterdick dropped out of the tree and landed beside her. He was rather grimy and there were bits of leaves sticking in his hair. He passed a self-conscious hand over it.

"We're a pair now, any way," he said whimsically.

The girl flushed a little; she was looking very happy and her eyes shone.

"I am sure you didn't come up with the intention of doing this," she said laughing.

He sobered suddenly.

"No," he said; "I didn't. . ." He paused looking away from her across the lawn where the setting sun was casting long shadows.

"I wonder if you will spare me a moment, so that I can tell you why I did come?" he said.

She looked surprised.

"Of course. But don't you want a wash first?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't mind if you don't." There was a gleam of amusement in his eyes. "I'm no more grubby than you are," he reminded her.

She laughed merrily.

"Very well." She turned to the boys. "Take the baskets to the kitchen for me," she said. "I'm just going to the gate with Mr. Winterdick."

"Is that a hint for me to go?" Philip asked. "Because I warn you that I'm not going . . . at least, not until I've said what I came to say."

She looked at him in puzzled silence, and suddenly Philip found himself longing to tell her the truth; to do the square thing by her as he was sure she would have done it by him; to tell her about Kitty, and his father's proposal, and about Mr. Dennison's conditions, and almost before he was aware of it he had blurted out that he was in trouble—rotten trouble—that he felt he must tell someone, and might he tell her?

"Why, of course," she said. "If there is anything I can do to help you. . . ."

"I thought at first you could," he interrupted. "That's why I came here; but now—somehow . . . somehow things seem different, and—and . . . it's just this, Miss Dennison—my father is a ruined man."

"Ruined!" She echoed the word with a world of dismay and sympathy in her voice, but Philip heard with gratitude that there was nothing of the angry incredulity with which Kitty had received his news. He blundered on:

"It's unlucky speculation. I don't know the whole truth myself yet. It seems extraordinary that a fortune like the Guv'nor's can be lost in a few hours, so to speak. But there it is. . . . We've got to leave the Highway House, unless . . ." He stopped—for the life of him he could not go on.

"Oh, I am so sorry—so sorry," she said compassionately.

She thought of the Winterdick's pride, of the position they had held in the county, and she realised what a terrible blow this would be for them. "Oh, I think money is the most dreadful thing," she said passionately. "It never seems to make people happy when they have it, and yet when they lose it . . ." She turned her grey eyes to him in sweet sympathy. "And is this what you wanted to tell me?" she asked.

Philip Winterdick drew a long breath; he felt as if he were about to take a plunge into icy water.

"No," he said at last, desperately, "it isn't; at least . . . Miss Dennison, I came here to ask you to marry me, but now . . ." He forced his eyes to her face, and for a moment there was absolute silence; then he rushed on: "Now, how can I . . . after what I've just told you . . . I—I . . . Oh, I can't tell you—I can't. . . ."

He had meant to do the square thing and tell her why he wanted to marry her, but now it had come to the point his courage failed him. He liked her too well—he realised that she was a girl to be trusted and honoured—and that if he told her she would probably despise him for the rest of her life. And Philip Winterdick was a man who liked to be thought well of.

He looked away from her, and for what seemed an eternity neither of them spoke. Then Eva said almost in a whisper—

"But . . . but why need what you have just told me—make . . . any—any—difference?"

"Why—why need it make any—difference?" Philip Winterdick could not believe that he had heard aright. He turned his head slowly and looked at the girl beside him,

then the hot colour flooded his face from chin to forehead. He stood still staring at her.

"You mean . . . you don't mean that . . . that you want to marry me!" he stammered at last.

Her head was downbent, and he could not see her eyes, but he saw the little quivering smile that curved her lips as she said softly:

"Why not, if . . . if you really want to marry me?"

He felt as if someone had struck him a knock-out blow over the heart. She must care for him then—that was his first thought, and it brought with it a tumult of emotion that for the moment robbed him of breath. He clutched at his scattering wits desperately.

How could she care for him? She hardly knew him. How could she possibly care, particularly after what he had just told her? . . . Not that money mattered much to the Dennisons, he supposed, but all the same. . . He took a little step towards her.

"I don't think you quite understand," he said with a note of great gentleness in his voice. "My father is a ruined man, which means that I also am practically penniless. I've never done a stroke of work since I left Oxford. I daresay it's a thing to be ashamed of, but it's a fact all the same. I shall have to start at the bottom of the ladder. . . Oh, you don't understand," he said again almost angrily.

"She looked up then.

"I think I do," she said. "But it doesn't frighten me at all. I've known what it is to be poor. I never expected to live in a house like this, and have a lot of money to spend."

She laid a timid hand for a moment on his arm.

"If you want to marry me, and I want to marry you, what does it matter what sort of house we live in?" she said.

Philip Winterdick pulled himself together with an effort.

"You're a brick," he said stumblingly. "A real brick—I . . . I'm not half good enough for you. . ."

He wondered if she considered herself engaged to him; there seemed nothing more to say; he wrung her hand hard and let it go.

He stammered out something about speaking to her father, about taking her to see his mother.

"I am afraid your mother won't be pleased," she said nervously.

"I think you will find that my mother will welcome you," he said, looking away from her.

They had reached the gate. Winterdick glanced at the girl and quickly away again.

He wondered whether she expected him to kiss her. He longed to kick himself, because he felt so stilted and unnatural. He thanked his lucky stars when Peter came up the road and put an end to any further tête-à-tête. He took his departure hurriedly.

"I'll come round after dinner—if I may," he said to Eva. He went off at a tremendous rate.

"Winterdick was in the deuce of a hurry," Peter said, rather uncomfortably, as he joined his sister. He wondered if Philip guessed that he had been to Kitty's and had purposely avoided him in consequence.

He looked at Eva's flushed cheeks, and a sudden suspicion grew in his eyes.

"What's he been saying to you, Bonnie?" he asked sharply.

Eva slipped an arm through his.

"I was going to tell you first, anyway," she said, with happy shyness. "Peter, dear, he asked me to marry him."

Peter gasped. He stopped dead for a moment, staring at his sister.

"And you—what did you say?" he asked blankly.

"I said 'Yes,'" she told him.

"Well, I'll be dashed!" said Peter.

He put an arm round her with rough affection.

"I say, I'm jolly glad—if you are," he said. He bent and gave her a smacking kiss. "I say, I hope you'll be jolly happy," he added lamely.

Eva returned his kiss heartily.

"Yes—I'm sure of that."

She was sure of it. There were no clouds on her horizon. She was still a little dazed and bewildered, but over everything the fact that life was glorious shone steadily. She had got everything she had ever wanted. The little Man in the Moon had not failed her.

## CHAPTER VIII

"Mr. Winterdick, if you please, sir." Mr. Dennison was nodding over his after-dinner cigar when Philip was announced, and for a moment he sat still in his big chair with a sort of sleepy bewilderment, uncertain whether he had actually heard the maid's voice, when Philip himself walked into the room.

That woke him thoroughly, and he started up with outstretched hand.

"My dear boy—delighted. Sit down—have a cigar—take my chair. Nonsense, I insist."

Philip ignored chair and cigar alike; he stood stiffly by the table, looking at his future father-in-law.

"You expected me!" he asked. "Miss Dennison told you I should be coming."

"No—not a word—but I'm delighted all the same. Do have a cigar—half a crown apiece they cost me. No! Very well, then. Sit down, my dear boy."

Philip was a little nonplussed; somehow he had been sure that Eva would pave the way for him. He felt at a shabby disadvantage.

Mr. Dennison looked at him and coughed nervously.

He always felt a little ill at ease with the Winterdicks, though he would furiously have denied it had the suggestion been made. He wished with all his heart that Philip would sit down. He was a small man himself, and young Winterdick towered above him and put him at a disadvantage.

"Hot night," he ventured after a moment.

"Very," Philip answered absently.

There was a moment's silence; suddenly the young man squared his shoulders resolutely.

"I've come to ask your permission to marry your daughter, sir," he said.

It was out at last, and he drew a long breath of relief. He had burned his boats behind him, and the sky had not fallen and he was still surviving.

Mr. Dennison dropped his cigar—it was a habit of his when he was very much astonished.

Perhaps the thing that had chiefly taken his breath away was the fact that a Winterdick—a Winterdick, of the Highway House—had called him "sir." He was almost stuned by the unexpectedness of it.

Seeing that the cigar was apparently to be allowed to burn a hole in the obviously expensive Persian carpet, Philip stooped, picked it up and placed it carefully on an ashtray.

Mr. Dennison darted forward.

"You shouldn't have bothered—it didn't matter. I've plenty more."

In his confusion he hardly knew what he was saying. His face was purple with excitement. The greatest dream of his life had come true, and here was the only son of the most blue-blooded and influential man in the county asking permission to marry his daughter!

"I'm delighted—of course, I'm delighted. It's been the dream of my life." He was too pleased to be diplomatic.

"Marry her by all means, Mr. Winterdick. She's a lucky girl."

He stopped, struck by something in the young man's face.

There was a little silence, then Philip said deliberately: "Isn't that a mistake? Isn't it I who am the lucky one?"

He shook his shoulders as if to rid them of a disagreeable burden. "Look here, Mr. Dennison, we may as well be frank with one another," he said roughly. "My father has told me of his conversation with you the other night, so it's useless for me to try and pretend innocence. . . . I have a great admiration and a deep respect for—for Miss Dennison, but—but if it had not been for your offer. . . ."

The elder man broke in eagerly:

"Not another word, Mr. Winterdick. I assure you I don't wish to hear another word. Any little assistance I may be able to give your father is more than repaid by the fact that you have done my daughter the honour to love her. . . ."

"But I don't love her," said young Winterdick.

The words were forced from him, and as soon as they were spoken he would have given his soul to recall them. But it was too late.

"I admire her and respect her more than any woman I know—except my own mother," he went on. "But it would be a lie if I told you I had any deep feeling for her. . . . We may as well have all the cards on the table while we are about it," he added, laughing mirthlessly.

But Mr. Dennison was not at all nonplussed.

"Well, well," he said, tolerantly, "you'll get along all right together. She's one in a thousand, though she's my daughter, and I'll guarantee that you'll be like love-birds before you've married long—hee-hee!"

He dug Philip in the ribs jovially.

"Well, here's wishing you good luck, Mr. Winterdick—or I suppose I must call you Philip now—eh? . . . I'm proud to welcome you as a son-in-law; I'm an ambitious man, Mr.—that is, Philip—and I always wanted to see my girl married to a real gentleman."

Philip moved restlessly; the situation was intolerable. Even now, at the eleventh hour, he would have thrown up the whole thing and told Eva the truth, but for the unconscious betrayal in her voice and in her words that afternoon when she had said. . . .

"But why need—what you have just told me—make any difference?"

He believed that she cared for him, and that fact alone kept him silent.

"There's one thing I must insist upon, however," he said presently, rather hoarsely. "That she—your daughter—is never told about your—our—despicable compact." He flushed up to his eyes. "Oh, I'm not proud of it," he said,

savagely. "I'm not proud of it, though I'm tending myself to your wishes, yours and my father's. But you must give me your word of honour that she shall never know—that nobody besides ourselves shall ever know."

Mr. Dennison held out his fat hand.

"I give you my word of honour, Mr. Winterdick."

"And I," said Philip, "give you my word of honour that I'll do my best to make your daughter happy. And—and I'm much obliged to you for—for my father's sake."

Mr. Dennison laughed.

"Don't mention it—don't mention it," he said, cheerily. "Just a little matter of business between business men, eh?—and nobody the worse. A few thousands more or less, what are they? Pooh! You'll have a glass of wine! Nonsense—I insist—" he crossed the room and rang the bell.

Philip walked over to the window; he stood there, looking into the garden, his hands clenched in his pockets.

He had never felt so ashamed and humiliated in all his life. He wondered what Eva would think if she could have overhead the conversation that had just taken place.

A maid brought decanters and glasses.

"And—er—just find Miss Eva," Mr. Dennison said in his most lordly tone. "Tell her Mr. Winterdick is here."

The girl had gone before Philip could protest. He was standing by the table, pale and silent, when Eva entered.

Her eyes went straight to his, with a little questioning glance. Mr. Dennison put his arm round her.

"He's told me, you sly little puss," he said. He gave her a squeeze. "I never was so surprised. How dare you steal a march on your father like this? But, never mind, I forgive you. Give me a kiss, and then I suppose you two will want a word together, eh? Tut, tut—I was young myself once." He raised his glass.

"To my daughter—and her future husband," he said, and drained the contents.

Philip looked at Eva—her face was a little tremulous. With an effort he smiled at her.

"To my future wife," he said huskily, "and to—our happiness."

"And now, you two must have a little chat," Mr. Dennison said importantly. "Yes, yes, I insist," as Philip would have spoken. "Where is your mother, my dear? I'll just go and tell her." He walked to the door, turned as he reached it and looked back at them. "I shall give her the surprise of her life," he said chuckling.

When the door had closed behind him, Eva look at Philip Winterdick.

"And what did father say when you told him?" she asked shyly. "Was he very surprised?"

"No, I . . . I don't know—he didn't say much. I think he was pleased though."

He felt the veriest hypocrite.

"Yes, I am sure he would be pleased," she said. A gleam of fun lit her grey eyes. "Philip, what will people say! All your friends in Apsley?"

"Does it matter what they say?" he temporised. She held her hand to him.

"I don't mind—if you don't," she said.

His fingers closed about hers.

"You're a thousand times too good for me—if you only knew it," he said. He bent his head and kissed her wrist clumsily, cursing himself because he was so tongue-tied and awkward. But Eva did not notice anything; she was too happy to be critical.

There was something of almost worshipful tenderness in her eyes as they met his troubled ones.

"I will be good to you—I swear I will," he said with sudden emotion.

## CHAPTER IX

APSLEY took the news of its most eligible's engagement well.

So far no news of the Winterdick's financial losses had leaked out, so the probability of Philip having coveted the Dennissions' money never occurred to anyone, and Kitty Arlington kept her own counsel.

When she heard the news of his engagement to Eva she was at first incredulous and then scornful.

It was so obvious why he had done it, she thought; firstly, out of pique, and, secondly, for money. She rather took it as a compliment to herself; when she saw Peter again she questioned him about it very tactfully.

Wasn't he surprised when he heard! Peter was bound to admit that he had been; he added that he had never imagined for a moment that Winterdick had been serious in his attentions to Eva. Then, struck perhaps by something in Kitty's face, he added loyally that, of course, he wasn't really a bit surprised. Any fellow with eyes in his head would see at once what a topping fine girl she was.

Kitty kept her eyes lowered. She said, "Yes, of course," sighed pensively and said she hoped they would be very happy.

"It must be lovely to be engaged," she said, and Peter got very red and admitted that he had often thought so, too.



He was very young at heart, and he did not at all realise that Kitty was leading him, on by gentle stages to a proposal. She did not care for him, but she liked his devotion and she had no intention of remaining in genteel poverty for the rest of her life. She was a year or two older than he was, but that did not matter. She wondered how she could suggest to him that he found out from his father what settlements might be expected.

The Dennisons were nobodies, of course, but the fact that Philip Winterdick was marrying Eva raised their status considerably.

Mrs. Dennison was elated over her daughter's engagement.

"My dear, how did you manage it!" she asked, amazed, momentarily deserting her fancy work to look at the girl.

Eva laughed. She understood her mother too well to be annoyed.

"I don't think I managed it at all," she said, happily. "It just came along."

"I always thought he was paying attention to that Miss Arlington," Mrs. Dennison resumed. "It only shows how mistaken one can be. And when are you going to be married, did you say?"

She spoke as if it were no concern of hers. Since they came to Apsley she had gradually drifted out of things, till now she was more like a spectator of her family's doings than one of them.

"I didn't say," said Eva. "I don't suppose it will be for ever so long. You see——" She stopped. She did not know if she ought to speak of Philip's affairs to anyone else. "There isn't any hurry," she added.

"I disapprove of long engagements," her mother said. "Get to know one another after marriage, that is my advice. Your father and I were engaged nearly four years——" She sighed, as much as to say: "Look at us now, and see what has come of it!"

Eva stood twisting her ring absently. She was wearing one of Philip's for the present.

"I'll take you to town to choose one soon," he said. "Will you wear mine in the meantime?"

"I'd much rather have yours," she told him.

It was rather big for her finger, but she loved it already; it seemed like a part of Philip himself—this ring, which he had worn ever since she knew him.

It was Saturday afternoon, and she was going up to the Highway House for tennis.

She had seen both Philip's parents since her engagement, and they had received her kindly.

"I am sure you will be happy," Mrs. Winterdick told

her. "Phil is such a dear boy. Of course, I shall miss him terribly—our only son, you know."

Mr. Winterdick had kissed her heartily. He thought she was a very fine-looking girl. "Not a bit like her father, thank God," so he said afterwards to his wife. "She'll be all right—she'll make the boy a good wife, you see if she doesn't."

They were both so cheery that Eva found herself wondering if perhaps Philip had been mistaken when he had said that his father was a ruined man! If it was true, it seemed strange, she thought, that there should not be more sign of trouble in the house. Mrs. Winterdick spoke of giving a dinner-party.

"I should like our friends to meet you, my dear," she said to Eva. "People who have known Phil ever since he was a small boy; they will be so interested."

Eva remembered this as she stood in her mother's room twisting her engagement ring.

Perhaps something had happened to change the complexion of things, she thought. She made up her mind to ask Philip about it that afternoon.

She had seen him very little since the night he asked her to marry him, and when they met there was generally somebody else present.

She did not guess that Philip tried to arrange it so. She never suspected what an unhappy man he was in these days.

He avoided most of his friends—he took elaborate precautions not to see Kitty Arlington. In a burst of good resolution he destroyed all her photographs and the few little notes he had treasured of hers. He meant to start again fair and square; he was not going to give Eva cause for a single misgiving.

He knew that Mr. Dennison had been to the Highway House, and that he and Mr. Winterdick had been shut up together for more than an hour in the library; he knew that the two men had consumed a bottle of champagne between them, and that his father had looked years younger after the visit. He also knew that his father had been to London to see his solicitor, and though Philip had not asked a single question, he knew quite well what had happened.

Ruin was averted, and life was to go on as it had been before that fateful night when they had asked this sacrifice of him.

He felt like a man who has committed a crime and who goes in mortal terror of being found out and convicted. Every time he looked at Eva he was sure that she must guess the truth; every time they met he braced himself to meet the worst.

The congratulations of his friends were perhaps harder to bear than anything else. Sometimes when he was smiling and listening to their well-meant remarks he felt as if he must say something to put an end to the farce—to tell them that he didn't care two straws about her—that, if they only knew, it was just a business arrangement between their respective fathers.

But the trouble was that nobody even suspected it, least of all Eva herself, and young Winterdick felt that it was her trust and ignorance that fettered him hand and foot.

There was nothing to do but go on with it, to make the best of a rotten business, to try and keep her blind to the truth until the end of the chapter.

The only one who was getting whole-hearted enjoyment out of the engagement seemed to be Mr. Dennison. He fancied himself exceedingly as future father-in-law to Philip Winterdick. He alluded to him on every possible occasion as "my future son-in-law." He assured everybody that the engagement was the outcome of love at first sight.

He had a vague idea that by so doing he was keeping his solemn promise to Philip that Eva should never know the truth. He chaffed his daughter whenever he got the chance.

He rather thought he would like to take her back to the little suburb where he had made his money, just to show his one-time cronies the height of fame to which he had risen. Without telling anyone, he had had a paragraph inserted in the local paper of his old home, in which great stress had been laid on the blue-bloodedness of the Winterdicks. He kept a cutting of it in his pocket-case and chuckled over it half a dozen times a day.

"I'm going to do the thing in style when you're married, my dear," he told Eva. "Nobody shall say that I didn't give my only daughter a slap-up wedding."

Eva laughed.

"We shan't be married for ages," she said. "Father . . . you know—of course, Philip told you about—about the money?"

"Money—what money?" There was a sharp note of inquiry in her father's eyes.

"I mean, that they had lost a great deal," she explained. "He told me that it practically meant ruin . . ."

Mr. Dennison laughed.

"Pooh! that's nothing—I know all about it—Philip told me."

"Of course, I knew he would do that."

"Yes—of course! Quite right of him—quite right. But it's nothing serious. In fact, Mr. Winterdick was

telling me only last night that they would manage to pull round. Things happen like that where there are large sums of money in question, you know.

"There's nothing for you to worry your head about, anyway." He patted her shoulder. "And I shouldn't talk about it if I were you. The Winterdicks are rather sensitive. Don't tell anyone, my dear—people are so willing to exaggerate."

"I should never think of telling anyone."

"Humph! Well, there's nothing to tell now, as it happens. You'll be comfortable enough when you're married. Trust me to see to that."

So Eva went to her tennis with a light heart. Philip drove over in the car to fetch her, as he had promised, but he brought Foster with him. He had made some excuse at the last moment, and been so obviously anxious for his friend's company that Foster had consented with mild amazement.

Eva was a little disappointed. She had wanted Philip to herself, but she was too happy to mind anything for long, and she laughed and chatted to the two men cheerily.

But somehow the afternoon was not such a success as she had hoped. She only played once with Philip; there were so many people present who wanted his attention.

"I mustn't be selfish," she told herself severely. "But—oh, it would be nice if I could just have him to myself!"

There was something else, too, that was worrying her, something of which she was half ashamed and which yet she could not forget.

Philip had not kissed her. . . . He had kissed her hand, that was all, and it did not seem right.

They had been together hardly at all, certainly, and yet her heart told her that had he chosen he could have made the time and opportunity.

It was the one small cloud on her happiness, and, try as she might, she could not disperse it.

She made every possible excuse for him—perhaps he felt shy with her . . . she laughed at herself for such a thought. How could a man be shy of the woman he loved?

She wondered if perhaps she had been too cold and stand-offish; the thought made her cheeks burn.

"I won't think about it any more," she made up her mind. "It will all come right if I am patient."

But she was thinking of it all the afternoon. She played badly, and her partner got irritable.

Eva apologised in confusion, but for almost the first time in her life she did not care if she played or not.

And then a kindly shower came down and soaked the courts, and made further play impossible.

Eva was thankful; she gave a little sigh of relief as she ran to the house with the others.

Philip took her racquet. "I'm afraid we shan't be able to play any more to-day," he said.

She laughed. "I don't mind."

He looked at her curiously. "Really! I thought you were never tired of tennis."

She coloured a little. "I am to-day." She paused, then added, with a sudden desperate courage: "I would much rather talk to you."

She could not look at him as she spoke; she almost felt as if she had said something forward.

Philip did not answer for a moment, then he said formally, "That is very kind of you."

The words sounded stilted, and Eva felt as if a rough hand had touched her heart.

This was not the sort of lover she had pictured for herself; this reserved, almost silent man, who was merely formally polite.

She sat very still, staring before her.

Philip rose. He had been sitting on the arm of her chair.

"Will you have some more tea?" he asked.

"No, thank you." She tried to speak naturally, but her voice quivered.

He looked at her quickly and away again; his face was grim. "Will you—oh, do have some more tea," he said with helpless impatience.

"No, thank you, really." She rose. "I think I must be getting back; I promised mother I would not be late, and the rain looks as if it means to last."

It was an excuse to get away, and he knew it as well as she did.

He took her cup and put it down on the table.

"Very well—I will drive you home."

She protested. "There is no need—it's nothing of a walk. I would rather walk."

His face grew obstinate. "I shall not allow you to walk."

Eva said good-bye to Mrs. Winterdick and the few people who were nearest to her. Without knowing exactly why, she felt as if this afternoon she had touched on the fringe of tragedy.

Philip brought the car to the front door. He had put up the hood. He still wore his flannels, and his sleeves were rolled back, showing his brown, muscular forearms.

Eva sat beside him. Her hands were tightly clenched under the light rug which he insisted that she used.

When they had driven perhaps half a mile Philip

stopped the car. He was perfectly well aware of what the girl at his side was thinking and feeling. He wanted to try and say something to make her happier; he wanted desperately to drive that set look from her face, but all he could stammer out was: "What's the matter! What have I done!"

She tried to laugh. "What do you mean! You haven't done anything—of course, you haven't."

"Then look at me."

"I would rather not."

There was a little silence, then he half turned in his seat. He put an arm about her shoulders and forced her to look at him.

"There are tears in your eyes," he said, angrily.

"What nonsense! I——" It was no use; the tears were overflowing now, and she covered her face with her hands.

Philip Winterdick looked away from her down the length of the rain-drenched road.

He knew, without any words from her that the first faint doubt was slowly making its way into her heart, and he knew, too, if things were allowed to drift on like this much longer he would be powerless to stop it.

"Look here," he said, desperately. "You're disappointed in me, that's what it is. I'm sorry—I'm afraid I'm not much of a . . . lover. . . . It isn't that I don't feel . . . don't mean . . . things that perhaps another man could say . . . it's only that—such things—don't come easily to me. . . ."

He broke off. He wondered if his halting explanation sounded as lame to her as it did to himself; he rushed on again anyhow. "Look here—will you take the risk—and marry me; marry me at once, I mean, and then . . . then I daresay we shall get to understand each other better."

There was a breathless silence. Eva raised her face, the tears still wet on her cheeks.

"I don't want to be married—if you don't," she said.

She was unconscious of the pathos in her voice, but it went straight to the heart of the man beside her; his arm tightened its clasp of her.

"Of course, I want to be married," he said, and his voice was more natural and sincere than it had been for a long time.

He even managed a laugh.

"Silly child—kiss me, and say you're sorry for being cross."

This easy, half bantering way of affection was easier.

He turned her face to him by its soft little chin and kissed her lips.

It was not a kiss of love, not even of passion; just a light, brotherly sort of kiss, but it swept the clouds from Eva's horizon with a magic touch; she smiled through her tears.

"I wasn't cross—it wasn't that at all."

"Then what was it?"

But she could not explain; she wiped her eyes ashamedly.

"Look—the sun's coming out again," she said.

"That's a good sign," he answered. "And when did you say you will marry me?"

"I haven't made up my mind."

"Very well, then, I'll make it up for you. Let me see—I suppose a fortnight is long enough for you to buy clothes in, isn't it?"

She laughed happily.

"Anyone would think I wanted dozens of frocks."

"Well, won't you?" he submitted comically. "I thought brides always had dozens of everything," he said laughingly. "Then we'll say a fortnight, shall we?"

"It's too soon—I couldn't possibly. . . ."

"Three weeks, then—not a day longer. What is there to wait for?"

"Nothing, but . . ."

"Then we won't wait. Three weeks to-day. I'll tell your father when we get back."

"He'll say it's absurd," she protested, but her heart was beating with excitement and happiness.

"Oh, no, he won't. . . . He put the clutch in and the car started slowly forward. "Three weeks to-day, you won't forget?"

"Is it likely?"

His eyes softened as they looked at her flushed face.

"How old are you?" he asked suddenly.

"Twenty-three."

It struck him as being pathetically young. He laid his hand over hers.

"We're going to be ever so happy, aren't we?" he said.

"Yes."

"And you'll never be cross with me again?"

"I wasn't cross. . . . It was only——" She turned her face away. "Somehow this afternoon," she said hesitatingly, "it all seemed wrong——"

"What seemed wrong?"

"Everything," she explained haltingly. "Our engagement—everything. . . . It seemed as if you . . . you couldn't really love me. . . ."

The wheel jerked beneath his hand and the car zig-zagged dangerously for a moment.

"That's rather an unkind thing to say, isn't it?" he asked presently.

"I really thought it," she said sadly.

"And do you still think so?"

"N—no. . . ."

"You don't seem very sure," he said grimly.

She did not answer, and he turned his head and met her eyes.

"Are you sorry you said you would marry me?" he demanded. He felt that he must say something to hide his own embarrassment.

She slipped a hand into his.

"I shall never be sorry for that," she said.

## CHAPTER X

DINNER was progressing rather silently at the Highway House, when Philip Winterdick suddenly pushed back his chair and announced that he was going to be married in three weeks' time.

Mrs. Winterdick gasped.

"Three weeks, my dear boy! What is the hurry—you've only just got engaged."

"I know . . . may I smoke?—thanks. . . ."

He lit a cigarette, conscious that both his parents were watching him in utter amazement.

"Come, come, Phil, there's no such hurry," his father protested. "Wait till you've got to know each other better—it's early days yet. . . ."

Philip laughed.

"Think so? Well, I don't, . . . we're going to be married three weeks to-day."

Mrs. Winterdick began to cry softly.

"I can't bear the thought of losing you. The house won't be the same without you."

Philip looked at her with hard eyes.

"Oh, I dare say you'll see me almost as often as you do now," he said. "I don't fancy we shall live in town a great deal after all."

"In town! But, Phil. . . ."

Philip went on rapidly.

"Mr. Dennison is giving us a town house for a wedding present; he's going to furnish it and all the rest of it. I saw him to-night, and it's all settled. . . Very generous of him, isn't it?"



His parents exchanged glances, and after a moment his father ventured another mild protest.

"It's a bit of a shock to your mother, you know, my boy; we hadn't thought of a wedding so soon. Why not put it off for a bit? Why not wait? . . ."

"Because, if I put it off now, it will be for ever," Philip interrupted passionately. "If we wait, it will never come off at all. Once we're married, it will give us both a chance to settle down. As it is . . ." He laughed drearly. "Another month of this and I shall have given the whole show away," he added.

He got up and began to walk about the room.

"There's nothing for you to worry about, mother," he said more gently. "Eva's all right—she's a <sup>+</sup>blazing sight too good for me. I shall shake down comfortably enough. It's only just . . . just the idea of it. . . . I've been so free—I've never been tied at all . . ." He laughed rather guiltily.

Was this how he would have felt if Kitty Arlington had been the girl he was to marry? He wondered. Somehow, in spite of everything, he did not think so. It had been easy to make love to her. He pushed the thought from him resolutely. She had thrown him over. He had wiped her out of his life for ever.

"I had hoped that perhaps you might both live here with us," Mrs. Winterdick said falteringly. "I am sure if I spoke to Eva about it . . . she seems such a nice girl."

Philip interrupted.

"She'd hate it, and so should I. It's kind of you, mother; but you know it never pays. We're far better in a house of our own . . . and as it's going to be given to us free of charge, well . . ."

"Phil . . . Phil," said his father, rebukingly. He was shocked at the hard bitterness in his son's voice.

The young man swung round. His eyes looked very fiery.

"I thought you'd both be pleased," he said loudly. "I quite expected to be overwhelmed with congratulations. Haven't I done the right thing? Don't you want me to get married after all?"

Mr. Winterdick had risen. He stood rubbing his hands together nervously.

"Yes, yes—of course, of course," he said. "It's only that we're so surprised—it was so unexpected . . ."

Philip stared at him, then he burst out laughing.

It really struck him as being intensely funny after all that had happened that his father should say he was surprised.

"Well, it's all signed and sealed," he said more quietly. "So you can see about a new get-up, mater. . . . It seems

that we've got to have half the county to see us married. Old Dennison is going to give us what he calls a slap-up wedding! Champagne flowing like water, and all the rest of it. . . ."

He broke off suddenly.

Buried deep down in his heart there had been such dreams of the future—such tender dreams of his wedding-day—dreams of which he had been half ashamed, and now . . . a loveless marriage! An impossible future—this was all he had to look forward to.

There was a tragic silence in the beautiful room. Then Mrs. Winterdick went over to her son and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Phil," she said gently.

"Yes, mother. . . ."

"You shan't do it, dear," she said tremblingly. "You've got all your life before you, and ours—mine and your father's—are nearly done. It's not too late—the girl can be told the truth—she must be made to understand. . . ." She looked away from him, and her eyes wandered over the room. She loved every inch of it, but she loved this man more.

"Oh, I must have been mad, mad!" she said passionately. "To think that I could ever really sacrifice you, Phil, my dear boy, let me tell Eva—I can take the blame—I can tell her the truth. . . . It's not too late. She must be made to understand that this marriage cannot take place. . . . The money can be given back—after all, there is nothing dishonourable in having to leave this house. . . ." Her voice faltered and died away.

Philip raised his hand, took hers, and kissed it on the soft palm. Then he put her gently away.

"You don't understand, mother," he said gently. "It is too late—it's . . . it's much too late. I ought not to have said what I did just now—I hope you'll both forget it. . . ." He turned to go, but she caught his arm.

"What do you mean, Phil? . . . not . . . you can't care for her—you don't want to marry her. . . ."

He shook his head. "I'm not the only one to be considered, am I?" he asked.

She understood. She let him go without a word. Her husband came over and patted her shoulder.

"You mustn't blame yourself—you mustn't fret—it's my fault—all my fault," he said brokenly.

She turned on him passionately. "It's my fault—oh, I must have been mad—to think of sacrificing him—it's his whole life—his whole happiness! What do a few years matter to us? It's of him we ought to have thought; our only son—our only son. . . ."

But she knew that Philip was right when he said it was too late. She knew that in honour bound—or at least what was left to them of their honour—they could not go back.

## CHAPTER XI

To Eva the next two weeks flew.

She was too busy to think much. She only knew that life was a wonderful happiness, with hours all too short and fleeting.

She saw Philip often now. He came and went as if he were already one of the family.

"Of course, as you're getting married in such a hurry, you young people," Mr. Dennison said once, "you'll have to wait to get your house in order till the honeymoon's over. You can come and stay here for a time if you care to. . . ."

"My mother will be delighted to have us," Philip said quickly. He felt that too much of his father-in-law would drive him mad. He was a constant reminder, an ever-present witness to the thing he had done and of which he knew he would be everlastingly ashamed.

"Of course, we will do whichever you prefer," he said to Eva.

"We can talk about that later on," she answered.

She could not really believe that her wedding day was so near. Though nothing else was ever spoken of she felt that it must be someone else's wedding for which such elaborate preparations were being made, and not her own at all.

Everything was ordered, even the wedding cake and her own bouquet.

Philip had proved himself wonderfully cognisant of what a bridegroom is supposed to do. He was, perhaps, too anxious to do everything expected of him. He was desperately afraid that he might fall short of the standard of perfection set up by tradition and generations of bridegrooms. He had loaded Eva with presents. He had given her a most expensive diamond ring, and was surprised that she still wore the one he had first given her.

"It's such a shabby old thing," he protested.

"I like it best—I always shall," she told him. . . .

Mrs. Winterdick was giving her much talked about dinner party two nights before the wedding.

Philip's best man was coming, and an aunt from whom he was supposed to have prospects, and everybody whom Mrs. Winterdick considered anybody at all.

"I shall be terribly nervous," Eva told Philip.

He laughed.

"I want you to meet Calligan. You'll like him—besides, you must know who's to be best man before the actual day."

He was getting quite interested and excited himself.

Eva had helped him considerably during the past fortnight. She was not in the least exacting.

"That girl will be a real pal to you as well as a wife," my boy," his father said to him once in a moment of illumination, and Philip felt a sudden warmth at his heart.

Of course he did not love her, but he was fond of her, and he respected her more than anyone he had ever met. He was quite sure that they would get along admirably together.

"Only two more days," he said to Eva one afternoon.

He had driven over to bring a batch of presents that had arrived the previous night, and he and she were standing at the front door. Philip was just going—he had such a deuce of a lot to do before the evening, he said. It was the night of the dinner-party, and Eva was a little flushed with nervousness and excitement already.

"I do hope Mr. Calligan will like me," she said suddenly.

She knew that Calligan was Philip's greatest friend.

"Of course, he will," Philip assured her. "And you'll like him, too—he's a ripping good sort. I've known him all my life."

He looked at her, and a sudden thrill of pride swept through him. She was so soon to be his wife, and she looked prettier this afternoon than he had ever seen her before. Her eyes were like stars and her face radiant with happiness.

He took a step towards her impulsively.

"Shall I come over and fetch you this evening?" he asked, with a curious note in his voice. "I shan't see you by myself all the evening—with all those people there. I can drive over in the car. Mr. and Mrs. Dennison won't mind." He was a little agitated and embarrassed.

"Would you like me to?" he asked, rather breathlessly.

But there was no need for her to answer. Her eyes were answer enough. Philip caught her hand and held it hard for a moment; then he turned away.

"I shall come at half-past six," he said.

She gave a little cry. "Half-past six—but dinner isn't till eight."

"I know—but I want to talk to you."

He drove off feeling happier than he had done for weeks. Things were going to be all right, after all.

He had slowed the car a little to turn out of the gate,

and as he did so a girl darted back just in time to avoid being knocked over. It was Kitty Arlington.

If the engine of young Winterdick's car had not, by some unkind freak of fortune, stopped at that moment he would just have raised his hat and driven on; but, as it was, the car came to a standstill just outside the gate, bringing its driver exactly abreast with the girl on the path.

She was looking very cool and dainty, as she always did, in a pale blue frock and a shady hat, and her little feet shod in the trimmest of high-heeled shoes.

Young Winterdick's heart gave a traitorous thump as he looked at her. It was impossible to avoid speech as he clambered out of his seat to restart the engine.

"Awfully hot, isn't it?" he said nervously.

"I like the heat." The blue eyes met his rather wistfully. There was a little silence. Philip had twice given the starting handle a gigantic wrench and failed to accomplish his object. He laughed in embarrassment; he was rather red in the face. Kitty watched him silently.

In her mind she was comparing him with Peter Dennison, and Peter suffered by the contrast.

He was only a stripling still, slim and boyishly built, whereas Philip was muscular and broad-shouldered—a man every inch of him.

"I haven't seen you for some time," she said, presently.

"Not since that night you . . ."

He broke in hurriedly.

"No—you've been away, haven't you! The time passes so quickly."

"To you, perhaps," she said, slowly.

She looked away from him down the hot dusty road with a little sick feeling of jealousy.

"I only came back last night," she said again. There was another little silence, then, "I have not congratulated you," she went on. "I suppose I may!"

"Thank you. . . ." Philip straightened his back, took off his hat and wiped his hot forehead. If only the confounded engine would start!

"I was surprised, of course," Kitty said. She waited a moment, then she added, in a low voice, "You might have given me another chance, Phil."

It was clever of her to get that genuine ring in her voice, he thought, savagely. He loathed himself because against his will he found himself wanting to look at her.

Perhaps it was as well for him that he did not realize that Kitty was as nearly genuine at that moment as she had ever been in all her life. The surprise meeting with this man had probed the little bit of heart which she kept carefully hidden somewhere beneath her frills and fur-

below. She wanted to cry and she wanted—more than anything—to surprise some sign of emotion in the face of the man who had once told her he loved her.

Philip looked at her with hard eyes.

"You gave me a very complete dismissal," he said steadily. "I could do no less than take it. I told you if you sent me away then that I should not come back." He gave the handle another wrench, and this time the motor began to chug encouragingly. There were tears in Kitty's blue eyes.

"I was sorry directly you had gone," she said, in a low voice. "I was so sure you would come back the next day—I hoped so—I looked for you, Phil."

He laughed bitterly.

"You were so sure that you got up a flirtation with Peter Dennison," he said savagely. "If it's any satisfaction to you to know it, I did come back—like a fool! I ought to have known better. I went along to see you the next evening, and I saw you—in the hammock—letting that—boy—kiss you! . . ." His voice was scornful. "That finished it for me. . . ."

Her tears were slowly fast now.

Philip glanced back at the house—fortunately they were hidden from view of the windows. He climbed into his seat.

"Good-bye," he said, curtly.

He felt that he would have given ten years of his life to have avoided this scene. He shut the door of the car with a little slam.

Kitty brushed her tears away. "You will never love her as you loved me," she said.

Philip looked at her and his heart contracted.

"No," he said, "I sincerely hope not." He drove off without another word. But his light-heartedness had gone.

Had he any right to marry Eva while this other girl still held his heart?

He knew her to be a worthless flirt, and yet . . . yet . . . He clenched his teeth in pain.

Nobody could account for love.

He wondered if he had been very rough and unkind. He hoped not. He made up his mind to keep clear of Apsley once he was married.

He knew that she was coming to the wedding. He would have given anything had it been possible to prevent it. Eva had asked her, and it had been impossible for him to object.

To stand at the altar with someone who was not Kitty, and to know that she was there behind him in the crowded church. . . . As soon as he got in he rang for a stiff brandy.

Preparations were going ahead for the night's dinner party. There were stacks of flowers in the hall and a great display of silver on the table as he passed the dining-room door.

Mrs. Winterdick met him in the hall. "Well, Phil, dear!" she said anxiously.

"Well, mother!" He stooped and kissed her. "This looks like business—eh!" He indicated the flowers.

"Yes. . . I wanted everything to be as nice as possible."

"It's sure to be top-hole," he said.

He turned to go upstairs. Mrs. Winterdick called to him. "There's a wire from Tom Calligan, Phil. He'll be on the 5.45. It gets in at 6.30, I think."

"Good! I'll run the car down to meet him. I—"

He stopped. He had just remembered his promise to Eva. "I forgot—I can't," he added hurriedly. "See that Banks goes, mother, will you, and tell him to take the runabout? I want my own car." He went on and up the stairs slowly.

"Mother!" he called over the balusters, "who else is coming to-night—besides the relations, I mean?"

She looked faintly surprised. "I thought I told you the list, Phil. There's the vicar, and Mr. Arlington and Kitty, and Mr. Spencer, and . . ."

Philip had disappeared.

Somehow he had hoped that Kitty would not come. He thought it would have been kind of her to refuse, knowing what she did. He went into his room and shut the door.

In two days' time he would be a married man. This afternoon he had found the thought rather pleasant, but to-night . . . He glanced at his watch. It was time to dress if he were going to fetch Eva at half-past six. He wished now he had not made the suggestion. He wished—but what was the use of wishing? He took off his tweed coat and flung it across the room.

If only it had been Kitty! If only she had stuck to him! If only she had put their love before everything else! If only . . . He met the reflection of his harassed face in the glass.

"You're a bally rotter, that's what you are!" He apostrophised himself disgustedly.

## CHAPTER XII

THE glorious summer sky had clouded over when Philip started for the Dennisons'. There was a distant rumble of thunder, and now and then large drops of rain pattered down on the hood of the car.

Philip was in evening dress and had not troubled to put on an overcoat.

"I shan't be gone half an hour," he objected, when his father asked where he was off to. "I'm only going to fetch Eva. I promised I would."

He drove fast, but the rain was coming down in torrents by the time he reached the Dennisons' house. From the window Eva saw the car swing in at the open gate, and her heart gave a little excited thrill.

She was quite ready to go—it never occurred to her, as it would have done to Kitty Arlington, to leave Philip to cool his heels for ten minutes or so. She came out into the hall to meet him, conscious that she was looking her best.

She was wearing one of her new dinner frocks, made of soft filmy white tulle, and her sole ornament was a little diamond pendant which Philip had given her. She had taken great pains with her appearance; she was so sure that Philip would notice what she wore to-night.

He smiled faintly as he saw her.

"Ready! Thank goodness you're not one of those who keep people waiting." He took her cloak from her. "Let me help you."

He had not noticed the frock! She tried hard to hide her disappointment.

"I think we're going to have a storm," Philip said. He got in beside her and tucked the rug round her knees.

"There was a wire from Calligan this afternoon. He is coming down on the 5.45. You wouldn't care to go round that way and pick him up, I suppose?"

For the barest second Eva did not speak. She felt a sort of bleak disappointment. What had she hoped for from this drive together! She hardly knew. She turned a smiling face to him.

"I should love to! I'm long'g to see him."

"Good!" Philip looked pleased. He had forgotten that he had proposed this drive together because he wanted to have her to himself for a few moments.

He looked much more cheerful as they drove off. It was still raining heavily. The wheels of the car sent a little squashy stream of muddy water in their rear.

"Warm enough?" Philip asked. He stretched an arm in front of her and tucked the rug in more securely. "You'll want a warmer one than this when we come back to-night."

Her eyes brightened. "Are you going to drive me home?" she asked.

"Of course." He laughed. "If you'll trust yourself



to me after all the champagne I dare say I shall have to drink before the night's over."

"I'm not afraid." He looked away from her.

There was a little silence. "What were you wishing that night when I saw you talking to the moon?" young Winterdick asked suddenly.

She flushed sensitively. "I can't tell you now—some day, perhaps . . ."

"When we're married?" he asked.

She did not answer. They were in sight of the station.

"I hope you'll like Calligan," Philip said. He was peering eagerly ahead of him. "The train's in, I think. . . . There's Banks with the runabout." He leaned forward and called to the man. "I'll take Mr. Calligan—you see to his baggage." He stopped the car and got out.

Several people stared at him interestedly. He looked a fine figure of a man, and Eva's eyes followed him with wistful pride as he went on and into the station.

She was glad to do as he wished, and pleased to meet the much-talked-of Calligan, but she had looked forward—oh, so much—to this little while alone with him. She had thought . . . she was half ashamed of her thoughts now as she sat there alone, with the rain beating down on the hood of the car.

After all, in another two days she would have him to herself. She need not be selfish and grudge him his friends, but he might have said something about her frock, she thought.

Philip was already coming back. He was followed by a square-shouldered man in a long coat, who was laughing a great deal. She could hear his cheery voice. He was chipping Philip, she was sure.

"Here we are," Philip said. "Eva, this is Tom—Tom, let me introduce you to Miss Dennison."

"Delighted!" Calligan hastily swept off the soft felt hat he wore. He looked at Eva with undisguised eagerness. He held out a hearty hand.

"Delighted!" he said. "I'm going to reverse the order of things and congratulate you. Phil's my best friend, you know." His eyes twinkled. "Perhaps, later on, I shall be able to sympathise with you, but now . . ."

Philip gave him a playful kick. "Dry up, you old idiot and get in. And don't crush Eva's frock . . ."

Eva laughed. She moved up closer to Philip to make room for Calligan. She looked at him interestedly. Not good-looking, not nearly so good-looking as Philip, but she liked his face, and she knew that she was going to like the man himself.

"I've heard such a lot about you," she said.

"Really! I only heard about you when I got the invite to the dinner and wedding." His brown eyes searched her face critically. "Phil was always a lucky dog," he said, with a sort of irrelevance.

They were laughing and talking happily together by the time they reached the Highway House.

There was a strip of carpet laid down to the gravel walk and a striped awning overhead. The footman hurried out when he saw the car.

Eva's heart gave a little thump of nervousness.

This was the beginning of her ordeal. She hesitated and looked at Philip.

He smiled, meeting her eyes. He held out his hand.

They went into the house together. Mrs. Winterdick came into the hall to meet them.

"My dear boy—you haven't brought Eva through all this rain in that open car—and Tom, too! How did you all manage to squeeze in?"

Eva laughed. "It was great fun," she said. She looked back at Philip, but he had already moved off with Calligan.

"I've always said you were a lucky dog," Calligan said when they were out of earshot. "But I've never really felt vilely envious of you until to-night.

Philip raised his brows. "Because I'm getting married?" he asked with faint irony.

"No! Because you've found the girl I've been looking for all my life," said Calligan.

Philip stared. "You like her?" he asked.

"Like her! I'll tell you one thing already, you old stoic, you," Calligan said, "and that is that she's a thundering sight too good for you."

Young Winterdick laughed.

"I'm not denying it," he said sombrely.

### CHAPTER XIII

AFTERWARDS, looking back on that evening, it all seemed to Eva like a panorama of light and colour at which she had only looked on and in which she had never really participated.

There were so many speeches—so many toasts to drink—so much laughter and popping of corks—so many good wishes, so many pretty women—she felt herself lost in a sea of noise and excitement.

She sat between Philip and Tom Calligan at the head of the table, and if she had been asked afterwards she

would probably have said that Tom talked a great deal and Philip hardly at all, but she could never be sure.

She knew that her father made a long and rather boring speech, in which he gratuitously dropped some h's and made the fact more noticeable by his frantic endeavours to recover them. She knew that her mother was inclined to be tearful because she thought it was the right thing to do. But nothing was real, though here and there a little cameo picture seemed to stand out clear-cut against the confused background.

Philip—first of all!—he looked so flushed and excited, and when he spoke his voice was rather loud, as if he were not enjoying himself quite as much as he felt people expected him to be and was anxious to hide the fact. He had never looked more handsome, she thought. She was so proud of him. Her whole heart was full of love and gratitude to him for caring for her.

Then there was Peter—Peter, who drank a little too much champagne and who looked at Kitty Arlington the whole evening, and Kitty herself, very young and pretty in her blue frock and with a white rose in her fluffy hair.

Philip seemed to avoid Kitty. Eva noticed that fact, and somehow it did not please her.

Then there was Mrs. Winterdick, smiling steadily, but often with the tears in her eyes as she looked at her son—and Mr. Winterdick, handsome and dignified, who called her 'My dear' whenever he spoke to her, and did his utmost to make her feel at ease.

But the worst moment of all was when somebody called for a speech from Philip, and he rose reluctantly in his chair and a sudden hush fell on the noisy room.

Eva looked round at the many faces. At the back of the room the menservants were standing in a solemn row, and beyond them again the grim, unsmiling portraits of dead and gone Winterdicks, and round the table there were the guests—her own father and mother, and Philip's, and many people whom she did not know, though she had been introduced to them all and had shaken hands with them, and there was Kitty Arlington and Peter. . . . It was odd how Kitty's little face somehow fascinated Eva and drew her attention again and again.

She did not want to look at her. She knew that she had never really liked her; and now, in the place of her old jealousy of Philip and Kitty was a growing jealousy of Peter and Kitty.

Peter was too good for Kitty—too honest and sincere. She looked again at Philip. He was standing up very straight and stiff, his fingers clasped round the stem of his wineglass. She heard him say that he was delighted t..

see all his friends present—that it was the most memorable occasion of his life. Perhaps he ought to say the happiest—“So far,” he added.

There was a chuckle from Calligan, and the rest of the table took up the laugh.

When it had died down Philip went on.

“I should like to thank you all—for myself . . . and . . .” He half turned and looked down at Eva. “And for my . . . future wife . . .” He stumbled a little over the unaccustomed words, and Eva raised her head suddenly and their eyes met.

Philip's were grim and unhappy and the little fond smile on the girl's lips seemed suddenly frozen.

There was a second of silence; a second in which she felt that she looked down deep into Philip's heart, and found that it was a sealed book to her—that she had never really known the man himself, or what he felt and thought . . . that he was as much of a stranger to her now, when their wedding day was but a few hours away, as he had been that afternoon—weeks ago—when he had excused himself from playing with her in order to be with Kitty Arlington.

She clasped her hands hard together in her lap—panic seemed to take hold of her. For a moment the whole room seemed to recede from her; she pressed her feet hard to the floor—she knew that Calligan bent and spoke to her anxiously—then suddenly everyone seemed to turn their eyes from her and rise in startled confusion as Kitty Arlington slipped fainting from her chair.

“It was just exactly the kind of thing Kitty would do,” Mrs. Dennison said afterwards resignedly. “Anything to draw attention to herself and create a scene.”

But at the moment, at least, consternation reigned. It was Philip who reached her first and picked her up in his arms, brushing young Peter unceremoniously out of his way.

The golden head with its simple white rose hung limply against his breast . . . To Eva that moment was the most cruel and vivid of the whole evening.

It was all over in a moment—Kitty was carried away, and Philip came back and went on with his speech, and everyone did their best to wipe out the little incident, but to Eva it had cut a chasm in her happiness, inexplicable, but irrevocable.

Afterwards in the drawing-room she only longed to get away from everyone and go home. Her heart was torn with a thousand unanswered questions.

Why had Kitty fainted? Why had Philip been so eager to lift her himself? Why, oh why . . . ?

"You're worn out," said Calligan at her elbow.

He had never been far away from her side the whole evening. His shrewd eyes had seen a great deal. In little ways he had stepped into the breach and saved her from herself a thousand times. He drew her away from the others now and found her a chair in a quiet corner of the big drawing-room.

He saw her pallor and the dark lines beneath her eyes; saw the way she kept clasping and unclasping her hands nervously—the unsteadiness of her lips.

He talked to her without making it necessary for her to reply. He spoke chiefly of Philip; about their 'Varsity days—of what a splendid sportsman Philip was—how popular he had been with everyone.

He gave her to understand that he himself thought the world of his friend, and that she was exceedingly lucky to have made such a choice. In spite of herself, Eva felt the shadows dispersing. When Philip came into the drawing-room she was laughing and talking as if nothing had ever marred her happiness. He came at once to her side.

He was a little flushed, and his eyes were rather reckless, but he smiled at her affectionately.

"I can't have you monopolising my property all the evening," he said to Calligan. He sat down beside her, laying his arm along the back of her chair with a little proprietary gesture.

Calligan rose. "If that means I am turned out . . ." he said playfully.

It was Eva who stopped him. "Oh, don't go—please don't. . . . I was just beginning to enjoy myself."

She dreaded being left alone with Philip. When she looked at him she felt her old doubts and fears returning. She was relieved when Calligan consented to stay.

They laughed and talked together so much that Philip's silence passed almost unnoticed; the time went so quickly that Eva was surprised when people began to leave and she heard someone say that it was nearly midnight.

She rose then—hurriedly.

"I must find mother. . . . She must be wanting me."

Philip caught her hand.

"I'm taking you home," he said authoritatively. "I've told your mother."

She gave in at once. "Very well. . ." She looked round the room. The crowd had greatly diminished. "Has Kitty gone? I wanted to see her," she said deliberately. "I hope she is all right again."

"She went home two hours ago," Philip said. His eyes met hers steadily. . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

"I think we ought to take Mr. Calligan with us," Eva said later, when she stood ready in her wraps. "Don't you want a midnight ride, Mr. Calligan?"

Calligan looked quickly at Philip. "No, he doesn't," Philip answered for him emphatically. "I'm not going to waste petrol on him. . . . Are you ready?"

There was a hint of impatience in his voice.

Mrs. Winterdick kissed Eva affectionately—she was pleased with the way in which the evening had passed off.

"Phil, are you sure the child is sufficiently wrapped up?"

"I'm quite all right," Eva assured her. "And it's such a little way.

"If I'd got an old shoe, I'd throw it after you," Calligan said.

He followed them out to the car. He appealed to a girl standing close by: "Anyone got a shoe to spare—or some rice?"

Eva laughed as she clambered in beside Philip. "You are two days too soon," she said. She peeped out at him from under the hood. Her face looked very sweet and happy.

Calligan sighed and his eyes clouded a little as they met hers. He had been wondering all the evening why he had only met this girl now, when it was too late. . . . The car started forward and disappeared into the darkness.

Philip did not speak till they were out in the road. In the glare of the great headlights the trees seemed giant shadows swooping down upon them from both sides.

"Tired?" he asked.

"Very." She gave a little sigh. "But it was lovely; I enjoyed it all so much. And I do like Mr. Calligan."

"So it appeared."

She laughed. She felt that if she once came down to his serious level she would say something which she would regret all her life.

Philip moved a little. "It's a dreadful business—this getting married, isn't it?" he said half in fun. "Thank heaven, we've only got another two days, and then. . . ."

"Then we shall have all our lives in which to be sorry that we did it," she said flippantly.

"What do you mean?"

She laughed lightly. "What I say! 'Marry in haste—repent at leisure,' you know."

He rammed the brake home viciously, bringing the car to a jerky standstill.

"Don't you want to marry me?" he demanded.

He could feel, rather than see, that she shrugged her shoulders. He had never known her in this mood before. It piqued and irritated him.

Until to-night he had been so sure of her—so confident that she would never fail him, but now he knew that Calligan had found her attractive, and that she in return had been greatly taken by Calligan, and a faint sort of dog-in-the-manger jealousy stirred in his heart.

"Why don't you answer!" he said brusquely.

He waited, then all at once he caught her in his arms. She struggled against him, but he held her fast.

"If you're trying to make me jealous . . ." he said between kisses. He had never kissed her like this before, and Eva did not know that she had only Calligan to thank for it now. He kissed her till she was breathless, then she turned her face and hid it against his shoulder.

Philip laughed rather shakily. "Now, do you know who's going to be master!" he said.

She did not answer. She was shaken to the depths of her being.

"I'll teach Calligan to make love to you," Philip went on darkly.

She had to laugh at that. "Oh, how foolish! Of course, he never did!" she protested.

Philip bent closer, trying to see her face. "Are you glad you are going to marry me?" he demanded in his best bullying manner.

"Of course, I am."

"Very well, then, I'll forgive you," he said magnanimously.

They both laughed at that, and he drove on again slowly.

"We must have been ages and ages," Eva said rather anxiously when they reached the house. "They will wonder where we have been."

She threw the rug aside and was opening the door when Philip stopped her.

"Eva—"

"Well!"

"Do you know that you've never—kissed me—not once, of your own free will," said young Winterdick, rather shamefacedly.

She sat quite still.

He waited—he was surprised how anxiously he waited, then he said with dignity: "Of course, if you don't want to . . ."

She made a little quick movement. She put her arms round his neck and, raising herself a little, kissed him right on the mouth.

"Eva—" He would have detained her, but she

escaped him and, with a murmured "Good-night," ran up the steps into the house.

\* \* \* \* \*

There were many conflicting emotions in the heart of young Winterdick as he drove back alone through the silent night.

If he had been quite honest with himself, he would have admitted that he was feeling almost happy.

But he had not yet reached the stage when he could be quite honest with himself. He felt shy of analysing his emotions. There was a sort of secret wish at the back of his mind to wait a little longer—to avoid taking himself to task, or sorting himself out, as it were, till his wedding day.

Something had happened that evening which had given him a nasty shock, and, as everyone knows, a shock also often has the effect of bringing a sick man to his senses.

The fact was that Philip Winterdick was almost sure in his own mind that Kitty Arlington had not really fainted at all. He hated to think it, but think it he did. He believed that the whole thing was just a pose—an elaborately-designed scene with which to play upon his feelings.

It had succeeded, too, up to a point. He had felt pretty sick with himself as he saw her fall from the chair. He had felt pretty sick, too, as he lifted her in his arms and carried her out of the room. For quite five minutes he had been convinced that he had broken her heart and half killed her by his faithlessness.

He had even been so utterly foolish as to drop a remorseful kiss on her golden hair when he thought nobody was looking, and had stood by in an agony of fear till she opened her eyes and looked—with deliberate intent, so it seemed—straight at him.

And that look had sown the seed of doubt in his mind. The more he thought of it, the more sure he was that the whole faint had been put on, and young Winterdick hated shams and artificialities.

Was there nothing genuine in the whole of her dainty composition? he wondered. Had he just been an easy fool, caught by her eyes and her smile and her pretty voice?

He thought of Eva in comparison with relief and gratitude; and during the evening Calligan had unconsciously fanned the flame of his feeling for her into something greater.

Then had followed that moment of jealousy when she had refused to answer his question in the car, and then he had kissed her, and then . . . here he shied away from what he had thought then. Though he was alone and it was dark, he coloured hotly at the memory of that moment. He



felt that the night had myriads of inquisitive eyes, all of which were looking at him. He drove the rest of the way at a terrific pace.

Calligan and Mr. Winterdick and several other men who were staying in the house were waiting up for him when he got back. Apparently there was still more champagne to be consumed, and Philip was immediately presented with a glass of it.

Across the room he met his father's eyes. "Your health, my boy," said the old man.

Philip hesitated; then he raised his glass. "To the best woman in the world!" he said.

#### CHAPTER XIV

THERE WAS A SOUND of wheels on a gravel path and a little flutter of excitement swept through the crowded church. Faces turned backwards towards the open door. There was a perturbed rustle of silken skirts.

In the front pew Mrs. Dennison grasped Mrs. Winterdick's hand.

"Has she come?" she asked in an emotional whisper. "Oh, I'm so glad she isn't really late. My heart is beating so! I told her not to get here too soon, but——" Her voice was drowned in the swelling tones of the organ.

For the moment at least everyone forgot the bridegroom, and Philip Winterdick gave a little sigh of relief and squared his shoulders as he turned to look down the long aisle.

He knew now how great had been the dread in his heart that something would happen at the last moment to prevent his marriage. An enormous load was lifted from his shoulders as he saw the little procession at the foot of the church form itself and move slowly towards him.

He looked at Eva, and he was conscious of a sudden tightening at his throat. In a few moments this girl in the white frock and filmy veil would be his wife. The plain gold ring which he had adjured Calligan a dozen times during that morning not to lose would be on her hand—she would call herself by his name—she would be his own, his very own.

His eyes never left her face as she drew nearer. He wished she would look at him. He took a little step forward as if to go to meet her, but Calligan nudged him violently and checked him.

Philip's head was swimming a little. For the moment at least he had forgotten to be nervous.

Eva was beside him now. He could smell the scent of the lilies she carried, and hear the nervous breathing of Mr. Dennison as he asked Calligan in a loud whisper if everything was all right.

And now Eva had raised her eyes—such sweet eyes they were—and for a moment she looked straight at Philip.

And then the parson spoke, and Philip listened like a man in a dream, and tried to believe that everything was real, and to realise what was really happening; to understand that this was his wedding day, and that instead of feeling a miserable captive, as he had thought he would feel, he was feeling absurdly happy.

He put out his hand and found Eva's and held it, and when he felt how her fingers trembled his own nerves suddenly steadied down, and he felt himself years older than she was; and the desire to be good to her and make her happy wiped out every other thought; and then he woke to the fact that it was time to produce the ring, and that Calligan had given it to him, and then . . . well, then he lost himself in the seriousness of it all, and only woke again to realities when he and Eva were in the vestry, and somebody was saying, "I must be the first to kiss the bride. . . ."

And he saw his mother take Eva in her arms and kiss her fondly, and then somebody kissed him, and he knew that it was Mrs. Dennison, and somebody else half shook his hand off, and somebody else wished him luck; and somebody else thumped him on the back; and then he signed his name with an abominable quill pen that squeaked, and then there was more kissing and handshaking, followed by a walk down an aisle that seemed endless, with Eva on his arm, and thousands of people staring at them both—then a wild rush into a closed car to escape confetti and rice—the slam of the door—a frantic cheer led by Calligan—and it was all over, and he was driving away from the church—a married man!

And the sun was shining, and he had never felt so happy in all his life—and he still held Eva's hand, and suddenly he bent his head and kissed the finger that wore his ring—kissed it again and again.

And it was just on the tip of his tongue to tell her the wonderful discovery he had made during the past two days when the short drive was at an end, and there were more congratulations and handshakes and speeches; and a cake to be cut and champagne to be drunk, and telegrams to be opened; and though Eva stood beside him most of the time, everyone else was claiming her attention and kissing her, unconscious of the fact that Philip was one burning impatience to get her to himself and tell her that this was

the happiest day of his life because he knew now that he loved her—that nobody had ever meant to him what she meant; that whatever had gone before, it was all wiped out now and forgotten . . .

But the time dragged on leaden feet, and it seemed an eternity till someone took Eva away to change her frock.

Philip gave a huge sigh of relief—it was one step on the way at least. He looked round for an excuse to escape from the noisy throng, but Mr. Dennison bore down upon him—Mr. Dennison, who had drunk quite as much wine as was good for him, and got hold of Philip's hand, and refused to let it go, and called him "Dear Boy" and grew almost maudlin at the thought of losing his daughter, and was only finally persuaded to desist when a message came that Eva wanted to speak to him, and he was escorted off upstairs, and Eva came out to meet him on the landing, and slipped her hand through his arm and kissed his flushed face and tried to thank him for all he had done for her.

Mr. Dennison slapped himself on the chest with pride.

"I promised you a slap-up wedding, and you've had it," he said. "It'll give Apsley something to talk about for weeks—eh, my girl! . . . I didn't mean to give 'em a chance to say I'd been mean where my only daughter was concerned." He fumbled in the pocket of his coat and produced an envelope.

"A little cheque," he said as airily as he could. "Just a little cheque to help pay for the honeymoon—eh! . . ."

She laughed, though there were tears in her eyes.

"Father! I don't really want it. Philip will pay for everything, of course."

He drew himself up with dignity.

"Philip! Pooh! Don't you be too humble with him, my dear," he said in a husky whisper.

"You're as good as he is, any day—and you've carried out more than your share of the bargain. . . ." There was a world of meaning in his voice. A little gleam of anxiety crept into his daughter's eyes.

"What do you mean, father?"

He drew her closer to him. In spite of all his faults he was really an honourable man; but the champagne had got the mastery of him now, and the excitement of the day and the knowledge of his own importance had gone to his head along with the wine; and in two minutes he had told Eva the thing which he had sworn never to tell her, and brought her happiness crashing to the ground in ruins.

She stood quite still, her face as white as the frock from which she had just changed. She did not faint—did not even cry out. Perhaps there had always been some vague knowledge at the back of her mind, and this had only finally

confirmed it. At any rate, she knew instinctively that her father had spoken the truth.

But her stunned silence awoke Mr. Dennison to what he had done. He looked at her anxiously.

"It makes no difference—none at all," he said. "Philip's fond of you—very fond. . . I promised him I wouldn't tell you. Don't let him know that I had told you, my girl. . . ." He said this over and over again.

Eva tried to speak, but no words would come.

Somebody called from the hall below: "Are you ready? You'll miss the train!"

She moved then. She clutched at her failing senses.

This was her wedding day. She had just been married, and to a man who . . . who had . . . It was like a knife in her heart.

She felt that she must throw herself down in an abandonment of misery and scream. But she just stood there, silently suffering.

Mr. Dennison had walked to the stairs. He tiptoed back with extreme caution to impress upon her that she must never let Philip know that she knew. . .

She shook her head. She could not answer, and he went away and left her.

One of the bridesmaids came running up.

"Eva, they are waiting for you—are you ready? Is anything the matter? You look so white!"

She forced herself to answer. "I am just coming. Go down, will you? I won't be a moment."

The girl hesitated. "But you look so ill—so . . ."

"There is nothing the matter . . . Please go and leave me."

The girl departed reluctantly, and Eva went back to her own room and shut the door and locked it.

Her wedding dress still lay on the bed. She looked at it with dull eyes. A long glass opposite reflected her figure. A tragic figure enough she looked as she stood there, leaning against the locked door, all the life and happiness wiped from her face.

"He married me just to save himself—just for—money!"

She thought she spoke the words aloud, but they did not pass her lips.

Presently someone came to the door, and knocked. "Eva! Eva!"

"I'm just coming."

She had only a moment to herself—a moment in which to fight her battle and grasp at her courage.

Downstairs a crowd of people waited to see the happy pair start away on their married life. She began to laugh

at the thought—wild, mirthless laughter that frightened her. She pressed her hands to her lips to check it.

A thousand little incidents that had vaguely hurt her, though she had never known why, came rushing back to her now with stunning force.

No wonder Philip had seemed cold and indifferent! How could a man force himself to love a woman for whom he cared nothing! Each thought was a fresh knife plunged into her bleeding heart.

He had never cared for her. It was all just a bargain, a business arrangement between his father and hers.

She had been sold at a price. No! not even that! Her father had paid Philip to take her and marry her!

For a moment she went mad. She tore the white wedding frock of which she had been so proud from the bed and trampled it underfoot. She rent the beautiful veil from end to end. She flung the sheaf of lilies which Philip had sent her across the room, breaking their heads and crushing their fragrance; and then she stood quite still in the midst of the ruin and disorder, staring at herself in the long glass with wild eyes.

"Eva—Eva!" It was Peter's voice now. With a great effort, she forced herself to move. She unlocked the door, but barred the way so that he could not come in or see what she had done.

"I am quite ready," she said, and her voice was so quiet and expressionless that the boy stared at her with sharp inquiry. Then suddenly he caught her round the waist, looking hard into her face.

"Eva!" he said breathlessly. "Good God! what has happened?"

"Oh, Peter—Peter!" For a moment she clung to him in an agony of pain; then suddenly she flung up her head with a little gesture of pride. She rubbed her white cheeks fiercely with her hands to bring some colour into them.

"Don't say anything. Just—leave me—alone," she said gaspingly. He fell back at once. He did not understand in the least what was the matter, but he felt instinctively that something terrible had happened.

Just for a moment Eva stood clutching at the balusters, then she drew a long breath, and went on slowly down the stairs to the crowded hall below.

Philip saw her coming. He gave one quick glance at her and turned away. He was horribly afraid that someone would guess how his heart was thumping with happiness—horribly afraid that he showed it in his face.

He walked to the door, only to be met by a volley of rice and confetti. He had always thought he would hate

this part of a wedding, but he found himself laughing and enjoying it.

"Don't forget your wife already, my boy," somebody called to him, and he went back and took Eva's hand, and together they raced for the car and such safety as it afforded.

The crowd clustered round them. There was much cheering and calling of last messages. Calligan was standing on the step of the car as it moved away. He caught Eva's hand daringly and kissed it, and Philip scowled. . . . He leaned out of the window and called to the chauffeur: "Drive faster—let's get out of this. . . ."

The car shot forward, and Calligan dropped behind.

Philip closed the window. He stood up, laughing and flushed, trying to rid himself of the shower of confetti that stuck in his hair and all over his shoulders.

As yet he had not looked at Eva—his heart was hammering up somewhere in the region of his throat. In another moment he would have told her how much he loved her—in another moment . . . half a moment . . . he found himself counting the seconds with boyish bashfulness; then suddenly he turned to her. . . .

"Darling . . ." he said, shakily.

She was sitting up very erect and still, her hands clasped in her lap, but when he spoke her name she turned her white face to him and looked at him with eyes that seemed to burn with living flame.

"There're no need to pretend any longer," she said, hoarsely.

Philip's heart gave a great throb of fear and for a moment seemed to stand still.

There was no misunderstanding the cutting finality of his wife's voice or the look in her eyes.

It cost him an actual physical struggle to find his voice. It was all husky and broken as he at last stammered out:—

"What do you mean? I don't understand. What do you mean that there is no longer any need to pretend?"

But all the time he knew.

Eva leaned back in the luxuriously padded car and laughed softly. To deceive him—only to deceive him as to the real state of affairs was her one thought! To keep her senses and self-control till she could get away alone and fight the terrible battle unseen, was her one prayer; she even forced herself to look at him.

"I think we've both been—rather clever, don't you?" she asked.

"Clever!" He could only stare at her helplessly. "I don't know what you mean—I can't understand."

"I think you do. . . ." She deliberately fastened a

knot of flowers in her frock—flowers which Calligan had thrust into her lap as she said good-bye to him; violets, they were—sweet-scented, Parma violets.

"We have both fulfilled our share of the bargain. . . ." She raised her eyes to his. "I suppose you thought I didn't know," she said calmly. "I must have acted even better than I thought I did."

"I don't know what you are driving at," he said roughly. "For God's sake let us have the truth. . . . Have you forgotten that this is our wedding day? That we have to spend all the rest of our lives together?"

His voice was hoarse and strained, but she did not flinch.

"You should have thought of that before," she said quietly. "I thought you must have done. You seem to have counted the cost pretty thoroughly in every other way. I'm afraid it's too late now to . . . go back! . . ."

"If this is just a trick; if you are trying to test me—to see how much I will stand . . ." He broke off—the car had turned into the station yard now, and a cheer was being raised by an excited group of people who had collected to see the newly-married pair leave Apsley.

It was impossible to escape the well-meant greeting; Philip forced himself to smile and bow and look as if he were the happiest man on earth—he did not dare even to glance at his wife.

The train was a few minutes late, and it seemed an eternity till they were safely in the compartment reserved for them, and the door shut.

Someone thrust a bouquet of flowers through the window just as the train was moving, and there was Tom Calligan, hatless and red in the face.

"They said I couldn't get here in time," he panted. "But I knew I could . . . Good-bye and good luck . . . Best of everything."

He spoke to Philip, but he looked at Eva all the time, and suddenly she rose and came across to him, leaning from the window as the train gathered speed.

"Good-bye come and see us as soon as ever we come back," she said.

"You bet," the answer came back on the breeze as the train slipped out of the station, and everybody that had hitherto counted in her life was left behind—except Philip.

She went back to her seat; she laughed a little as she sat down.

"It makes one wonder what they would say if they knew the real truth," she said. "Doesn't it?"

Philip was standing up, stowing the various traps on the rack. He turned now and sat down opposite to her. He was very pale and there was a desperate look in his eyes.

"And what is—the real truth?" he asked.

His hands were clenched and their knuckles stood out white. In all his spoilt and pampered life he had never suffered as he was suffering now; and the worst was yet to come, he knew.

She raised her brows delicately.

"The real truth! Surely you don't need me to tell you that, my dear Philip?"

He had never heard her speak in such a voice before; he had never seen that look in her eyes; she was like a stranger, and yet . . . he loved her now as he had never thought it possible to love any woman.

"If you're trying to punish me," he said violently, "you're succeeding; but for God's sake put an end to it. I love you—I love every hair of your head. I've behaved like a brute and a cad, I know. There's no excuses to be made for me; but forgive me—forgive me."

"There's nothing to forgive," she said coldly. "You are no more to blame than I am. You wanted money and I"—she drew a long breath—"I suppose I thought it would be a fine thing to marry into a family so honourable and blue-blooded. We've both got what we wanted—and so we're quits; but to pretend that you love me—"

Philip covered his face with his hands. Had she really known all the time! Had she really been playing a double game, even as he had? If so, his burden of shame and remorse would be doubly hard to bear.

It seemed a long time before either of them spoke again, but in those few moments Eva had gained another respite, and gathered her forces together afresh.

"I don't know that there is any need to be so tragic about it, is there?" she said. "It's not as if you've discovered anything fresh. You've known all along that this was just a business arrangement—I never pretended to—to care . . ."

"You did . . ." He raised his white face, and his blazing eyes accused her.

"You did pretend to care . . . in thousands of little ways . . . I told you that I was a ruined man before I asked you to marry me, and you said it made no difference—you let me see then that you cared—"

"I only cared as you did . . . for the things I wanted and thought I should get . . . to live at the Highway House . . . and to marry a Winterdick . . ." She broke off with a little sobbing laugh. "Aren't you proud that I was willing to go through so much to get you? Aren't you proud that we thought you were worth so much! . . ."



If you admit that father paid you to marry me, you need not forget that I had to buy you for a husband . . ."

Philip was staring at her with a curiously-awakened expression in his eyes; suddenly he began to laugh—inane, mirthless laughter.

"So you're all the same, you women," he said dully. "I could have staked my life on it that you were different. A thousand times I've hated myself because I thought I wasn't good enough for you; a thousand times I've felt that I ought to go on my knees to you and ask you to forgive me for the . . . rotten game I knew I was playing!"

He laughed again, helplessly. "I might have saved myself the remorse—I might have known that you weren't the honest . . ." He broke off. He brought his clenched fist down on his knees in a passionate revolt.

"I'll not believe it," he said loudly. "You could never have lied to me like that! No woman could have kept it up as you say you did. . ." He ran his fingers through his hair with a distraught gesture. He tried to force his thoughts to travel back over the road to that night when he had asked her to marry him. There were so many little remembrances which somehow had only returned to his memory during the past few days.

"There was that night—when you cried," he went on again disjointedly. "That day of the storm—when it rained . . . you were upset with me then . . . you were unhappy because you thought . . ." She broke in passionately.

"It's only what I could expect of you, I suppose, to remind me of it . . . There are things I might remind you of as well, but I won't . . . What's the use? We are married—we've got to make the best of it. I'm willing to. I'm willing to play the game if you will. People need never know—I couldn't bear it if they did. We can go on—outwardly—as if nothing had happened . . . we've pretended so long, we shall soon be so used to it that we shall begin to think it's the real thing after all. . ." Try as she would, she could not keep a little broken note from her voice. Philip heard it, and in a moment he was beside her, his arms round her, holding her desperately.

"You don't mean all this," he said. "You're trying just to hurt me. I love you—I love you so much that I can't bear it any longer. Eva, for pity's sake—give me a chance. It hasn't all been my fault." He stopped, somehow he could not bring himself to speak of his father and mother's share in this tragedy. "I'm willing to do what you like," he went on. "I'll do anything, if only you'll give me a chance—if only you'll try to care for me.

There isn't anybody else, is there?" he pleaded brokenly. "There isn't anyone else you would rather have married than me! Tell me that, and I don't mind half so much—if I just know there's even the smallest hope."

She did not answer; she could not force her white lips to speak; and he went on:

"That night when I met you in the road—you'd been wishing to the moon . . . I've hoped since—I've thought that perhaps you . . . I . . . it might have been something to do with me. If it was—Eva, you must have cared a little—ever so little perhaps—but still you must have cared."

She found herself listening to his voice, though she tried to shut her ears to it. The clasp of his arms made her long to yield to them, to let her head rest against his shoulder; to sob out the whole broken bitterness of her heart—to tell him the truth—that she had always loved him, that she had never loved him so well as now, when she had resolved to steel her heart against him for ever.

"No—no—no." The monosyllable was echoing over and over again in her mind. "No—no—no!"

She held herself stiffly within the circle of his arms; she kept her eyes rigidly averted from his passionate face.

"If there was anybody else—it would be too late now," she heard herself saying dully. "I don't forget that I'm married—besides—"

He forced her head back against his shoulder, so that he could see her eyes.

"You mean that there was . . . someone else—someone you would rather have married than me—if . . . if he could have given you—what I can, the things you say you want . . ."

She closed her eyes with a sort of sick faintness.

She could not bear much more, she knew, but she clung fast to her will and determination.

He might break her body—he might hurt her, but he could never make her give in to him and admit that she loved him.

Pride, like an unscalable barrier, stood between them. He had married her for a price . . . for a sum of money to save his name.

She would never forget that—never . . . never . . .

She could feel his quick breath on her face—"Answer me . . . answer me . . . There is someone else . . . someone you prefer to me!"

"Yes." Afterwards she was sure it was never she who said it—that someone else spoke the word for her; and with that lie a great stillness seemed to fall on the whole

world, her head tumbled weakly against her husband's shoulder and she fainted quietly away.

When she opened her eyes again, her hat was off and she was lying back on the seat, the breeze from the open window fanning her face.

She struggled into a sitting position, and Philip, who had been bending over her, straightened himself and moved away.

There was a moment's silence, then Eva began to sob—deep, heart-broken sobs that wrung his heart.

He let her alone. He sat staring out of the window at the glorious summer afternoon and tried to realise that this was his wedding day; tried to understand that he was the same man who yesterday had looked forward to it with such happiness; that she was the same girl whom he had placed head and shoulders above all others in the world.

Presently, when Eva was quiet, he spoke, without looking at her.

"We shall be in London directly. I hope you feel better. I am sorry if I have frightened or upset you. I hope you will forgive me."

He spoke slowly, as if he were choosing his words; he turned his head and looked at her.

She had dried her eyes and was fastening on her hat with fingers that shook pitifully.

"There's nothing to forgive," she said in a low voice. "I blame myself—as much as I blame you."

She did. It seemed incredible now that she ever could have believed in him or his boasted love—ever imagined that he would want to marry her for any reason save the money which she would one day receive from her father.

But for that unluckily moment with Mr. Dennison on the landing, she might never have known; she might have gone on for months, or perhaps years, living in her fool's paradise, until something happened to make her suspect.

She dabbed her eyes with her handkerchief.

"I am afraid I look rather dreadful," she said shakily. "Are my eyes very red?"

"No." He could not bear to look at her tear-stained face; the tears were not very far from his own eyes.

The train was running into the big London terminus; Philip stood up and began to take down the cases from the rack.

He felt like a man in a dream.

"St. Pancras . . . All change."

As the train slowed down a couple of porters rushed clamouring to the door. Somebody had tied a white

streamer to the handle—Philip saw it and wrenched it off with sudden passion.

It was that fool Calligan, no doubt . . . He crushed the offending ribbon into a coat pocket; he was white to the lips as he turned to Eva.

But she would not look at him; she would not see his offered hand; she stepped out of the carriage unassisted.

And this was the beginning of the wonderful journey to which they had both looked forward with such passionate happiness.

## CHAPTER XV

"If you please, ma'am, Mr. Winterdick asked me to say that dinner is ready and that he is waiting."

Eva turned listlessly from the glass and looked at the smiling maid.

"Thank you—very well."

The door closed softly.

Eva glanced at her watch—a little absurdity in brilliants and platinum, which her father had given her amongst a host of other presents—nearly eight o'clock!

More than two hours since they reached the hotel; two hours during which Philip had not once been near her; two hours during which she had sat almost without moving, trying to look ahead into the future and make some sort of plans.

For the moment she knew that she had succeeded in her desperate attempt to deceive the man she had married and save her own pride; but as yet only two hours of their lives had passed, and the remaining years of it lay before them both, dark and without hope. She had not shed another tear, and her heart felt like a stone. She changed her frock mechanically and brushed her hair.

It did not seem to matter in the least how she looked. She remembered how she had longed for him to notice her frock that night at the Highway House, and how disappointed she had been because he had made no comment. She smiled faintly at her wan reflection. She felt an impersonal sort of sympathy and sorrow with the white-faced girl there in the mirror.

She turned out the light and opened the door. Philip had taken a private sitting-room; she wished now that he had not; things would have been so much easier and more possible with other people all around them.

The room was just opposite her own, and its door stood

ajar. She could see an edge of white tablecloth and a glow of pink light from a shaded lamp.

Just for a second her courage failed her; her feet seemed chained to the ground. Then she went on and pushed the door wider.

Philip was standing by the window, his hands clasped loosely behind his back, looking out into the busy street. He turned sharply as he heard the soft sound of her entrance, and for a moment their eyes met across the room; his, hard and unhappy—hers, very quiet, but cold—cold as a stone.

"I hope I have not kept you waiting."

"Thank you—not at all."

There was a maid in the room—an interested maid who had been told that these two were on their honeymoon; but it must have been some other couple, she decided, as she served the dishes and quietly withdrew.

The light from the shaded lamp fell full on Eva's slim figure in its dainty frock; she looked so young—little more than a child—as she sat there trying to eat.

She still wore her wedding ring—Philip had noticed that directly she came into the room; somehow he would not have been surprised if she had discarded it; he was conscious of a faint sense of relief. He made one or two desultory attempts at conversation, but it was uphill work; only when the maid brought coffee and liqueurs, and finally withdrew, he gave a great sigh of relief and pushed back his chair.

Eva spoke then:

"Don't you think if we are going to stay here that we might as well have our meals downstairs; it would be more interesting?"

"If you would prefer it." He almost laughed as he spoke.

They had been married—how long!—four hours at the most, and already she was trying to find something more interesting than his society.

He could not believe she was the same girl who had looked at him with such shy happiness in her eyes beneath her wedding veil only that morning; the girl whose face had flushed like a rose as they drove away from the church together, and he bent to kiss her hand with its very new ring; what horrible spell had been cast over them both to bring about this change? He felt as if he were struggling helplessly to free himself from a net, in which he only got more entangled as he tried to escape.

"Do you mind if I smoke?" He knew she did not; but it was something to say.

She answered him at once.

"Please do."

Philip lit a cigarette and puffed at it once or twice elaborately, then he forgot it, and allowed it to go out.

The situation grew more impossible with every moment; he pushed back his chair and rose; he felt as if he were stifling; he walked over to the window and flung it wide.

Lamps had been lit in the street below, and there was a faint breeze springing up, fanning the face of the hot earth.

What to do! What in the wide world to do. . . . His brain felt like a fiery wheel, going round and round in small circles, from the confines of which he could not escape to freer thought or action.

How long did she mean to keep him in this—hell! He knew that he deserved it all—knew that it was a just punishment, and yet he could not quite kill the hope in his mind that soon she would be sorry—that the sweet, gentle nature he had known and grown to love would rise uppermost again, and she would forgive him and be kind to him, and tell him they would forget it all and start afresh.

He had noticed the cold pallor of her face—the dark circles beneath her eyes, and his heart ached for her.

And yet, why be sorry if she really did not care. . . . He forced himself to turn and look at her.

She had taken up a magazine from a side table and was idly turning the pages. The little casual action turned his blood to fire. He strode across the room and, snatching it from her hand, flung it into a corner. He faced her panting, with blazing eyes.

"How long is this—to go on!" he demanded.

She looked at him disdainfully, not answering.

He broke out again stammering.

"For God's sake, what has changed you so? . . . Tell me the whole truth. I can bear that, whatever it is, but not this—this damnable coldness. . . . How long are you going to treat me like this?"

She moved back to her chair. She was trembling violently.

"I don't know what you mean," she said with an effort. "I have fulfilled my share of the . . . bargain—compact! whatever you like to call it. I have married you, and my father has paid over the money—as you arranged."

"It was not my arrangement. I swear on my word of honour. It was no arrangement of mine."

The grey eyes were raised steadily to his.

"You mean that you asked me to marry you because you loved me and for no other reason?"

"Yes . . . no . . ." He swung round with passionate gesture. "I don't know what I'm saying," he said shakily. He waited a moment, trying to control himself. Presently he came back. He stood looking down at her.

"I didn't love you when I asked you to marry me," he said then, with difficulty. "I'll be frank with you—I'll tell you the whole truth, so God help me. I didn't care for you when I asked you to marry me—"

She interrupted gently:

"I'm not asking for any confession, and I'm not going to make any to you. You wanted my money—and I wanted to call myself your wife. Well"—she moved her white shoulders carelessly—"we have each got our wish—that is all; but you can't blame me if I want to go my own way. It's a pity really that we had to have a honeymoon—we were quite good friends up till to-day. You can still go your own way—I shan't be exacting—and I can go mine. Lots of people arrange things like that, don't they? Lots of your blue-blooded friends, I mean," she added deliberately.

Twice he tried to find his voice and could not; then he broke out hoarsely:

"You are proposing, in fact, to make our marriage—no marriage at all." He made a quick step forward; he stooped and covered her clasped hands with one of his, holding them tightly. "My dear," he said, with broken gentleness, "you don't know what you are suggesting. You're such a child. I'm not trying to—to preach or—or influence you. I know I deserve all you can ever say to me, or make me suffer—but—but at least I'm a man of the world, and I know—I know that these sort of things always spell disaster. You say you don't care for me—that you never did. Very well, I am willing to accept that for the moment. You say there is another man you prefer to me. If that is the truth, why didn't you marry him? You're not the sort of girl to—throw a man over if you love him, for—for the rubbishing advantages you can get from me. Eva—answer me."

He could feel how her hands shook beneath his grasp.

"He didn't care for me—that's why," she stammered at last. "I thought he did—but—but he—didn't, after all."

She forced her eyes to meet his. There was a sort of comfort in the knowledge that she was speaking the real truth now, whatever half-truths she had spoken before. She went on:

"That night—when I was wishing to the moon . . . when you came along the road—I was wishing then . . . that—that he might . . . care . . ." she laughed wildly

"But he didn't—he didn't—he never cared for me at all."

"And so—when I asked you . . ."

She moved her head restlessly.

"Oh, what does it matter! Why need we go over it all! We're married. It's done with and finished for ever. I only want you to leave me alone—to let me go my way. I shan't do anything that will shock you or hurt your name . . . She laughed. "I quite realise you've done me an honour by marrying me, but in every other way we're quits. . . Philip, you're hurting my hands."

He released her instantly.

"And this is all you've got to say to me!" he said dully.

"Yes." The word was just a whisper.

He began pacing up and down the room. A dozen times he passed the chair where she sat; a dozen times he almost went on his knees to plead with her—to beg her not to ruin his life—to try to love him—but somehow he could not.

Nothing he could say now make her believe in him, he knew. He had brought this disaster upon himself. It was his just punishment, and, besides—she did not care! . .

That was the hardest cut of all. . . .

He tried to think of one incident when he had suspected that she was deceiving him and fighting him with his own weapons. He tried to remember one moment when he had not been sure of her, but there had not been one.

She had been cleverer than he after all. She had beaten him at his own game.

He stopped in his pacing and looked down at her.

"And you think that you will be happy—living like this!" he asked hardily.

A wave of desolation swept over her. Happy!—when every beautiful dream and hope in life was dead!

She dragged her eyes to his face.

"I think I shall get used to it—in time—if you . . . if you will be—be patient with me," she said, choking.

"Patient! . . ." when his heart was breaking.

"It's no use telling you that I'd die for you this moment, because you won't believe me, I know," he said, in a strangled voice. "It's no use telling you that you've taken everything from me that I shall ever care about, because you won't believe that—either. . . . Will you!—will you!" He drove the words at her.

For a moment her determination trembled in the balance. Was it the truth!—she longed to believe him . . . but he had been as clever before—he had deceived her before with words and kisses, and brought her to this



suffering. . . . Not again! Oh, never again could she live through it.

She forced her cold lips to speak.

"No—I don't believe it," she said, voicelessly.

Philip turned blindly away. There was a little throbbing pulse hammering madly in his temple; he felt as if he were choking.

He reached the door and stood there grasping the handle, hardly knowing what he was doing; he felt as if pride and desire were fighting for possession of his very soul.

If he left her now, this would be the end of everything, he knew. He could never go back again and plead with her; it was for all their lives. . . .

His fingers mechanically turned the handle and opened the door. Then suddenly he shut it again with a slam, he went back to where his wife sat; he put his arms round her and, lifting her up to him, held her against his heart.

"Give me a chance to make you care," he said brokenly. "I know I'm a rotter—I know I'm not good enough for you—I'll be patient—I'll not ask anything . . . just tell me that perhaps—some day—Eva—I beg of you. . . . After all, I'm your husband."

But she had reached the end of her endurance; she struggled free of him; she put the width of the table between them, and faced him across it, white-lipped and panting.

"I've done my share," she said shrilly. "I've kept my part of the compact. I've nothing more to give you—nothing."

She met his blazing eyes, and sudden fear of him filled her heart. She backed away from him to the door; she put out her hands as if to ward him off.

Philip caught them both in one of his—he put an arm round her, holding her so that she was like a child in his grasp.

"You're my wife," he said hoarsely. "You can't undo that, no matter how much you try; but if you think I want a woman who looks at me as you do—who hates me as you do——" He let her go so violently that she almost fell. He turned away from her and, dropping into a chair, hid his face on his outflung arms.

There was a long silence, broken only by the girl's frightened breathing; then she opened the door slowly—slowly, and crept away, leaving him there alone.

## CHAPTER XVI

THE day after her marriage Eva wrote home to Peter:

"I dare say you will be surprised to hear that Philip and I have decided to stay in town after all. I've never really seen London properly—not the rich side of it, I mean, and it looks as if the weather is going to break up, and I should hate the Lakes if it rained all day. I don't know if we shall stay at this hotel. I like it all right, but, anyway, any letters sent here will be forwarded."

Peter was amazed. Eva had been so frightfully keen on the Lakes—and, as for the possibility of the weather breaking up, well, he looked out of the window at the bright sunshine and a little qualm touched his heart.

He had not yet forgotten his sister's tragic face that moment, when she clung to him on the landing, and though he could not understand it he in some vague way connected the incident with this letter.

He was so perturbed about it that he put it into his pocket and did not mention it to anyone. He was extremely fond of Eva, and it worried him considerably to think that perhaps something really serious was the matter.

She had looked happy enough in church while they were married. He had heard comments on all sides about her radiant face. It didn't seem at all likely that anything could have occurred between the moment of leaving the church and his own encounter with her in the landing of the house to spell tragedy.

But he felt unhappy about it all day. He even kept away from Kitty Arlington, although he had promised to go round in the afternoon. Twice he sat down to write to Eva, and each time tore up what he had written.

It was all nonsense to be so concerned! She was quite all right. Philip was a thundering good chap.

He was glad all the same when, after tea, Tom Calligan came over from the Highway House; Peter liked Calligan.

He had been persuaded to stay on till the end of the week, he explained—Mrs. Winterdick said she missed Philip so, that she must have someone to take his place.

"So I thought I'd stroll over and dig you up," he added casually.

As a matter of fact, he was anxious to get better acquainted with Eva's family; presently he asked if anybody had heard from the happy pair. "It's not likely,

though, I suppose," he ad'ed. "They'll have no time to write letters home."

Peter hesitated; he had not meant to mention his sister's letter to anyone, but all at once he changed his mind.

"Well, as a matter of fact, I had a letter from Bonnie this morning," he said uncomfortably.

"Bonnie!" echoed Calligan, not understanding.

"Yes—we call Eva 'Bonnie,' you know. She wrote from town——" He hesitated; he looked at Calligan critically. "I say, you won't tell anybody if I tell you something, will you?" he added in embarrassment.

"Of course not—what is it? Nothing wrong, I hope."

"I don't know . . ." Peter produced the letter from his pocket. "They were going to the Lakes, you know; Eva was fearfully keen, and all the rest of it, but in this letter she says that they have decided to stay in town! Think of it—grilling weather like this."

Calligan looked blank.

"Well, why not, if they prefer it?" he said.

"I know—but that's not it." Peter ran agitated fingers through his hair. "I don't know in the least why I'm telling you at all," he said awkwardly, "except that I suppose you know Philip better than I do. . . . Look here, he's all right—isn't he? Decent chap and all that, you know?"

Calligan answered without a second's hesitation.

"He's one of the best—never knew a straighter fellow in all my life."

Peter looked relieved.

"I'm glad to hear you say that, because . . ." He laughed.

"It sounds silly now I know," he apologised. "But I've been rather worried about Eva—just before she went away, after the wedding, something happened—I don't know what it was, but she was dreadfully upset, and so—with this letter coming on top of it . . . you see what I mean, don't you?" he asked, helplessly.

Calligan did not answer for a moment; then he said, carefully:

"She probably was upset about leaving home. Lots of girls are, you know; I don't think there's anything to worry about."

Peter drew a breath of relief.

"Glad to hear you say so," he said. He stowed the letter away again. "Of course, you won't tell anyone I said anything!"

"Certainly not."

"She's such a sport, you know," Peter went on,

earnestly. "I should hate to think she'd made a mess of it—you know what I mean!"

"Yes, but I'm sure there's no fear of that. I've known Phil for years—he's all right; he's a white man."

But though Peter had in reality said very little, he had somehow managed to convey his own uneasiness to Calligan, and he laid awake quite an hour longer than usual that night, thinking about Eva and wondering.

It certainly had struck him as odd that Philip had never even mentioned her name to him until he wrote to acquaint him with his coming marriage. Philip was rather a communicative sort of chap, as a rule; and, now he came to think it over, Calligan remembered that there had been another girl to whom his friend had been rather attentive early in the spring—a fluffy-haired girl who had been a guest at the wedding.

He could not remember her name, but he could remember having chaffed Phil quite a lot about her on his last visit to the Highway House. Anyway, she wasn't a patch on Eva Dennison, so it could not be possible that there had been any trouble made there; he resolved to ask Peter about it next time they met.

It was with this intention that he went over to the Dennisons the following morning. He found that Peter was not quite so pleased to see him as he had been previously; he said something about having an appointment down the village, that he was sorry to be unsociable, but that he was in the deuce of a hurry.

"That's all right," Calligan said easily. "I'll walk along with you. . . . I'm in no hurry."

Peter was not particularly pleased, but he had to submit, and the two men strolled along together.

Calligan was not very good at diplomacy, and he went straight to the object of his visit without preamble.

"What's the name of that fluffy-haired girl who used to be at Winterdicks' rather a lot in the spring? She was at the wedding, I know. I remember speaking to her, but I'm hanged if I can think of her name."

Peter coloured a little.

"Do you mean Miss Arlington—Kitty Arlington?"

"Kitty—that was the name, of course. . . ." Calligan had been frowning slightly, but now suddenly he laughed. "Do you know, I rather thought Phil was a bit struck in that quarter at one time."

Peter had thought so, too, but he was not going to admit it.

They had almost reached Kitty's house now, and Peter stopped. "I've got to pay a call here. Good-bye for the present."

Calligan nodded and walked off thoughtfully.

"Kitty!" That was the girl, of course. He remembered uncomfortably how on many occasions Philip had given him the slip in order to go to her. It was not so very long ago either, now one came to think of it—August, July, June. Only about three months ago. He turned into a little shop to buy some tobacco.

"By the way," he said, casually, as he was leaving. "which is the Arlington's house—can you tell me?"

The woman came to the door and pointed it out—the very house into which Peter had gone a few moments ago.

"Well, I'll be dashed!" said Calligan, disgustedly.

He was not so sure now that he liked Peter Dennison particularly, after all.

## CHAPTER XVII

Eva's prophecy with regard to the weather was not so far out, after all, for two days after her marriage the sun suddenly drew the clouds about its face and torrents of rain descended on London.

There was a chilly wind, too, and summer frocks were hastily replaced by warmer clothes, and stout boots and mackintoshes became the order of the day.

The Winterdicks took their meals downstairs now with the rest of the hotel visitors. They sat at a little table in the window and talked platitudes for the benefit of the waiter or anyone else who might be at hand, as if—so Eva told herself bitterly—they had been married for years and years!

Since that first night Philip had made no attempt to allude again to their estrangement. He was always courteous and kind, always willing to do anything she wished, but his attentions were those of an ordinary acquaintance. Whatever his real feelings were, he hid them admirably, and Eva told herself fiercely that she was glad she had not believed in his sincerity when he pleaded so passionately for another chance; that it showed she had been right to refuse to listen, seeing that he had so soon apparently got over his disappointment.

She did not understand that it was because his remorse and hurt were so deep that other attempts were absolutely impossible to him. His one desperate desire now was to hide from her how much he cared.

It was horrible humiliation—it was never-ending torment.

He never knew how he dragged through the days.

He and Eva walked together, and drove and shopped and went to the theatre. Now and then they ran across an acquaintance of his. Once—when she had dismissed him for an afternoon, he wandered in sheer desperation round to Calligan's bachelor flat; but it was shut up, and the caretaker told him that Mr. Calligan was still down in the country.

Philip's face brightened a little.

"At my place, do you know! At the Highway House!"

The man said that he believed so. He knew young Winterdick well, and had heard of his marriage. He unbent a little and ventured to congratulate him.

Philip laughed.

"Thanks—thanks, very much."

He turned abruptly and walked away through the pouring rain.

A taxi-driver hailed him at the end of the road, but he shook his head. A taxi would take him back too quickly. If he got to the hotel there was nothing to do, and Eva did not want him.

He could not really believe that they were married—he and she. He had never been so utterly wretched in his life.

He hated London—he had only agreed to stay there because he felt that it might be a degree less impossible, as things were, than the beauty of the Lakes. He wondered what on earth they were going to do when they got back to Apsley. Everyone would know then, he felt sure.

He wandered about the West End till he was tired out, then he went back to the hotel and implored a man whom he had never before seen to play a game of billiards with him.

The man agreed, but Philip played so badly he did not suggest a second game. The man thought Philip must be ill. He looked after him curiously as he wandered aimlessly away.

He stood for a moment in the wide entrance hall; there was an orchestra playing and people sitting about having tea; he felt utterly at a loose end. He wondered where Eva was, and what she was doing, he went up to their sitting-room again; the door of her bedroom opposite to it was partly opened; with sudden impulse he went across to it, lifted his hand to knock, then turned away again.

What was the use! It was hopeless.

He went into the sitting-room; he sat down straddle-ways on a chair and stared out of the window.

The rain was pouring down steadily; the big drops splashed up from the pavement in diminutive fountains.

Philip crossed his arms on the chair back and rested his chin on them.

If they were only back at Apsley, perhaps things might improve, he thought hopelessly; more than once he had thought of suggesting to Eva that they went back, but he did not believe she would consent. They had started on a three weeks' honeymoon, and so far only three days of it had gone.

He bowed his head on his arms in utter weariness of heart and soul; for the first time in his happy life Philip Winterdick honestly wished himself dead.

"Philip. . . ."

He started guiltily and turned; his wife stood behind him.

He got to his feet clumsily; he hated himself for having let her see his despondency.

"I thought you were out," he said stupidly.

"No. . . ." She glanced towards the window and the cheerless street, and suddenly she said: "Philip—can't we go home?"

"Home!" His face flushed eagerly. "Do you mean to Apsley?"

"Yes—I hate London—I've never hated any place so much in my life; I hate this hotel. . ." Her voice quivered; she bit a lip hard to steady herself.

He laughed mirthlessly.

"We're agreed in that, at any rate," he said. He looked at her silently for a moment. "When do you want to go?" he asked.

"As soon as possible—to-morrow, perhaps."

"Very well; I'll tell them here. He half-turned to the door. He never dared trust himself alone with her, but a thought suddenly struck him, and he stopped, looking back at her.

"You will come with me to the Highway House, of course?" he said, stiltedly.

There was a little silence.

"Surely there is no need for that?" she said then, in a low voice. "I can go home. . . . I would much rather go home."

"If you prefer it we will go there, certainly," he said, purposely misunderstanding her.

She looked at him with startled eyes.

"I don't want to make plans for you; I want you to be quite free. Your people will like to have you. . . ."

Philip's sombre eyes flamed.

"If I go to my people you will come with me," he said obstinately. "If you insist on going to yours, I shall come with you. I have given in to you so far, but I will not have

public scandal. You understand——” He paused. “Well, which is it to be?” he asked.

For a moment she did not answer; then she broke out angrily:

“Then I will stay here—that is all; I will stay here.”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“Very well; as you please. Then we will both stay.”

He was moving away from the door, when someone knocked. “A telegram, please, sir!”

Philip took the envelope from the tray; he wondered who on earth it could be from. He had not given their address to anyone; he supposed Eva must have done so.

He read the message through, and his face paled. “Come at once. Mr. Winterdick dangerously ill.—Calligan.

“No answer . . .”

Philip crossed the room and gave the message to his wife.

The great fear and apprehension in his heart made him almost brutal. “You’ve got your wish, you see,” he said curtly. “We’ll go home at once.”

## CHAPTER XVIII

THE miserable day was drawing rapidly to a close as the train crept into Apsley station. The windows of the carriage were dimmed with rain, and the countryside through which they had passed was soaked and depressing.

Philip had hardly spoken since he had given Calligan’s wire to his wife to read.

Eva tried to tell him how sorry she was; had tried to cheer him up—to assure him that his father would probably be better when they reached Apsley, but he hardly seemed to listen to her.

She knew that Philip had thought the world of the old man, and for the first time since their marriage something of her old feeling for her husband stirred in her heart, and crept through the pride and pain that had numbed her.

She looked at him as he sat opposite to her in the carriage and saw the worry in his eyes, and with sudden impulse she leaned over and touched his hand.

“Philip—I am sure there is no cause for alarm. I am sure he will be much better when we get there. I daresay he asked Mr. Calligan to send for you.”

Philip looked down at the hand resting on his.

“Thank you,” he said with an effort. “Yes, I hope so, too.”

He let the window down and stared out over the



darkening country. How everything had changed in the three days since they left it; then the sun had been shining gloriously; now it might have been a chilly October day judging by the keen, damp air, and the pungent smell of the wet earth and fields.

He rose to his feet with unutterable relief as the train ran into the station. He was out on the platform before it had properly stopped, looking eagerly up and down.

"Someone ought to be here to meet us," he said. "I wired. I thought perhaps Calligan. . . . Here he is."

He turned eagerly as Calligan came quickly towards them. He was muffled to the eyes in a big waterproof coat. He glanced once at Eva and hurriedly away again.

Philip caught his arm.

"How is he? Better? What happened? He was all right when we went away."

"It was a stroke. I—Phil, old man—I'm so horribly sorry, but—but you're too late. He died half an hour after I wired."

There was a very real emotion in Calligan's kind voice. He knew what a bitter blow this would be to his friend.

He was desperately sorry for Eva, too. What a home-coming for her! For a moment Philip stood quite still. Great as the dread in his heart had been, he had not expected anything so bad as this. The shock robbed him of all power of speech or even thought. Then he began to walk on blindly.

Eva followed with Calligan. The tears were running down her cheeks. She had had such a happy life, even in the days when they were poor, and now it seemed as if it was to be nothing but tragedy upon tragedy.

A car from the Highway House was waiting for them outside. Calligan put Eva in to it and Philip followed.

"I'm going in front with Banks," Calligan said. He gave them no time to object; he shut the door.

Philip leaned forward with his face buried in his hands. He had forgotten his wife; he had forgotten everything but the awful shock of the news.

It had been a vain sacrifice after all. He had struck at the very foundations of his own happiness in a blind endeavour to save his father from disgrace, and now his father was dead.

Eva sat beside him silently till she could bear it no longer. She slipped her hand through his arm.

"Oh, I am so sorry, so sorry, dear," she said. The little word of endearment slipped out without her knowledge.

"If I could only do something to help you."

He moved his arm away from her. He felt that her sympathy would be more than he could bear just now.

"It's all right," he said unsteadily "I'm sorry for you, too. . . . If you'd rather go home—to your people. . . it won't be very cheerful at the Highway House just now. . . . I'll tell Banks to stop if you'd rather go home."

For an instant she struggled with her pride; Was she so little to him that he did not care to have her with him even now? Then she remembered that he was in sore trouble, and that her place was by his side.

"I will come with you, of course," she said quietly.

He made no comment, and presently the car turned in at the gates of the old house.

Everything looked so different from what it had done when they left it only three days ago.

The flowers in the garden beds were beaten down by the rain. The house was almost in darkness, and silent—so silent. . . .

Eva shivered as she followed her husband into the hall. She felt as if a lifetime must have passed since she was here before.

A red-eyed maid took her coat and bag; she heard Philip asking where his mother was; heard Mrs. Winterdick's voice from upstairs: "Phil. . . oh, Phil. . . ."

Philip went up the stairs two at a time.

Eva looked at Calligan with a little quivering smile.

She felt oddly out of it and unwanted, and he seemed to realise it, for he held out his hand—

"I dare say you are cold and hungry. I told them to light a fire—let me get you something to eat."

He took her into the drawing-room and put her into an armchair; he took the pins from her hat with clumsy fingers, and fetched a stool for her feet.

"It's no use all of us being uncomfortable," he said when she protested. He rang for a maid and ordered coffee and sandwiches.

"Philip's all right for a little time," he said cheerily.

"We'd far better leave him alone."

He made her eat and drink; he noticed how pale and unhappy she looked, and he thought apprehensively of Peter's incoherent story.

"I'm glad I happened to be here," he said presently.

"It was an awful shock to everyone, of course. . . ."

"I'm glad you are here, too," Eva said.

She was glad; she felt instinctively that here was someone who would be a kind friend to her.

She wondered why he coloured as their eyes met.

"Have you seen any of my people?" she asked him presently. "Father—or Peter, or any of them?"

She felt that she had been away for years, and that she wanted to hear news of them.

"I've seen Peter one or twice," Calligan told her. "I sent a message over this afternoon to say that we'd wired for you."

She looked at him gratefully.

"You seem to think of everything," she said.

She held her hands to the fire and watched the light shining on her wedding ring. There was a little silence. Calligan was watching her with thoughtful eyes.

He was more glad than he could express to see her again. He was conscious of a sort of quiet content at being with her.

Eva looked up suddenly and met his earnest gaze.

"What are you thinking about?" she asked impulsively. Calligan started guiltily.

"I was wondering why you hadn't finished your coffee," he said, with pretended severity. "Haven't I put enough sugar in it—or too much—or——?"

He stopped as the door opened and Philip came into the room.

Eva rose at once and Calligan slipped away.

"I've been wondering what is the best thing for you to do," Philip said. He spoke to his wife without looking at her.

"I don't want you to stay here if you would rather go to your own people, but my mother, of course——"

Eva interrupted, her colour deepening a little.

"I shall stay here; at least—if I shan't be in the way," she added rather pathetically.

Philip seemed more of a stranger to her now than ever before, and yet she knew that deep down in her heart she had never cared for him so much. Even her first romantic love for him had not touched the depths which these last three days had reached so easily.

He looked a little relieved.

"Thank you—I am glad," he said. "Your rooms are ready for you, and mother would like to see you, if you will go to her."

She waited a moment, but apparently he had nothing more to say, and she passed him with drooping head.

Her heart seemed to be breaking with passionate love and pity for him. She longed to go back and tell him that she could not live this lie any longer, but she went on steadily, and the door closed behind her.

She met Calligan in the hall; he saw the tragedy in her eyes, though Philip had been blind to it.

He asked a hurried question.

"Are you all right? Is there anything I can do for you?"

"No—nothing, thank you."

He went to rejoin his friend.

He was sure now that disaster of some kind had befallen these two, and already, without the least knowledge of facts, he condemned Philip; his face was a little unfriendly as he entered the drawing room.

"The mater tells me that you've been a brick," Philip said. Calligan shrugged his shoulders.

"I happened to be here—that was all."

"I wish to God that I had," said Philip.

There was a little silence.

"It's rough on your wife—coming home to this," Calligan said then deliberately.

"Yes." Philip got up and began roaming restlessly round the room.

"I suggested that she went to her own people," he said presently. "I thought it would be better for her; but she preferred to stay here."

Calligan stared.

"You suggested——" he began blankly, then stopped; he was afraid of saying too much.

There was a little silence.

"I should have thought you would have wanted her here rather particularly," he said then dryly; for the life of him he could not have kept the words back, but Philip hardly seemed to have heard. He came back to where Calligan stood by the fire.

"I hope you'll stay on here for a bit with us," he said.

"Can you manage it, do you think?"

Calligan laughed rather dryly.

"I can manage it—but . . . wouldn't you rather I cleared out! I should have gone back this morning, only . . . well, you know!"

"I should like you to stay if you haven't anything better to do."

"My dear chap, when have I ever had anything better to do?" Calligan had been thinking lately with a sort of chagrin of the rather aimless existence he had led since his 'Varsity days.

A small income, just sufficient for his not very extravagant wants, had been his ruin.

There had been a time when he had had great ambition, and when people had prophesied a future for him; but he had drifted—there had never been any real incentive to get on; he was a singularly friendless sort of man.

He had often thought in an abstract sort of way of getting married and having a home of his own, but he had never met a woman who had helped the abstract idea to mature until a week ago when he came to the Highway House and met Eva Dennison.

And she, of course . . . He looked at Philip with a cynical smile in his eyes.

Things were very badly arranged, he considered. He wondered what his friend would say if he could know the thought passing in his mind at that moment. Philip certainly looked anything but a happy bridegroom, even allowing for the sudden shock of his father's death, and a gnawing anxiety grew in Calligan's heart.

He was fond of Philip. The two men had always been close friends, but Calligan knew that if he ever discovered that Philip had been the cause of the tragedy in Eva's grey eyes it would mean an end to that friendship for ever.

Later on, when they were all making some sort of pretence at a dinner, he watched them closely, these two, who had been married only three days and who yet, even to his unobservant eyes, seemed so estranged and apart.

Eva and Philip sat on either side of the pathetically empty chair at the head of the table, and both of them tried to avoid seeing it.

Nobody wanted to eat; but it was something to do, and Calligan did his level best to second Eva's nervous attempts at conversation.

It was uphill work, and all three of them were glad when the meal was ended.

Eva went back into the drawing-room and knelt down by the fire; outside she could hear the steady rain battering against the windows, and the wind sighing in the shivering trees.

Presently Calligan joined her; she looked past him as he crossed the room, hoping that Philip would follow.

Calligan read the wistfulness of her eyes.

"Someone has called to see Phil on business," he said, quickly. "He'll be here in a moment."

He stirred the fire into a blaze.

"Do you live in London, Mr. Calligan?" Eva asked him presently.

"I do—I rent a very modest sort of bachelor flat, which is looked after by a caretaker person. It's not in at all an aristocratic neighbourhood—Tottenham Court Road way."

It did not convey much to Eva.

"I am glad you live in London," she said. "You'll often be able to come and see us, won't you: when we settle down in our own house, I mean?"

Perhaps it was the glow of the fire that made Calligan's face look rather red.

"I shall be delighted, of course," he said. "But, as a matter of fact, an uncle of mine has just offered me the job of going to British Columbia for him for three months. Nothing very particular to do, you know—a cushy sort

of job that will just suit me; as a matter of fact"—he laughed rather self-consciously—"I had intended to ask Philip to come along with me—it wouldn't have been a bad trip for the autumn—but, of course, now he is married, it's all knocked on the head, naturally."

"Why knocked on the head?" asked Philip's voice, coolly.

He had come into the room unnoticed, and was standing behind his wife. "It's just the kind of trip I should like," he added deliberately.

There was a moment of dreadful silence. Eva had flushed scarlet; she half turned in her chair; she raised her eyes to her husband's face—such wounded eyes they were—and her lips fell a little apart, childishly.

Calligan stooped hurriedly and began a furious onslaught on the fire; he was burning with indignation which he did not dare to show. Philip looked by far the least concerned of the three; he was selecting a cigarette from his case; he kept his eyes fixed steadily on it.

"British Columbia is a place I have always wanted to go to," he said casually. "When are you thinking of going, did you say?"

"I didn't say." Calligan's voice was brusque; he dropped the poker with a clatter. "As a matter of fact, I don't suppose I shall go at all."

"Well, if you do——" Philip took a long puff at his cigarette. "I'm your man. I should like to get away for a time. Don't forget."

Calligan did not answer; he could not trust himself to look at Eva; a clock on the shelf struck nine; the silvery chime seemed a tremendous sound in the silence.

Eva counted the strokes mechanically; when the last one had died away she rose from her chair.

"I think I will go to bed," she said. "I am rather tired."

She held her hand to Calligan; she tried to smile, but it was a piteous failure. "Good-night, Mr. Calligan."

"Good-night, Mrs. Winterdick."

He held her hand for a moment, then moved past her to open the door. Eva looked at her husband, hesitated a moment, then turned away. She passed Calligan with averted face; she crossed the hall and flew up the stairs to her own room. She shut and locked the door and fell face downwards on the bed.

Much as she had suffered during the past two days, to-night had been the worst of all.

She was here in Philip's home, but she felt herself a stranger and unwanted.

Mrs. Winterdick had received her kindly, but the girl

had felt herself to be beyond reach of the elder woman's grief.

Much as she longed to help and comfort her, she had been thrown back on herself and had only been able to stammer a few words.

Philip cared nothing for her; she had never felt it so acutely as just now, when he had calmly announced that he would be quite willing to go off with Calligan to British Columbia.

And they had only been married three days!

She did not cry; she just lay there, her eyes hidden; she felt humbled and shamed to the earth.

He had married her without a spark of affection for her, and now, having got his desire and saved his father's name, he was prepared to let her go to the wall.

"I can't bear it, I can't," she told herself in anguish; but she knew that she had got to bear it unless she wanted the whole scandal to be made public property; unless she wished to be pitied and discussed by the whole countryside.

She did not know how the time passed as she lay there in the silent room; she only stirred when she heard Philip's voice on the landing outside. She started up then, trembling. But he was evidently only speaking with Calligan, for she heard him pass on, and then the shutting of a door on the other side of the landing and silence again.

And this was her home-coming! She wondered if any other bride in the whole world had ever had such a reception. She sat on the side of the bed, twisting her wedding ring and staring before her heart-brokenly.

She could have been so happy if only he would have let her. She could have made him happy, too, she was sure; but he did not want her. She had just been a means to an end, and now that end was accomplished she might go.

She looked round the room listlessly. It was a beautiful room, beautiful with an old-world sort of charm which is invariably associated with quaint chintzes and old-fashioned furniture.

Someone had put a bowl of white roses on the dressing-table; she looked at them with apathetic eyes.

The roses were a little dashed by the heavy rain, but their fragrance was sweet. Tears filled her eyes as she looked at them. She had had white roses in her wedding bouquet. She thought of the moment when she had dashed them across the room, trampling them under foot.

It was beginning to get light before she thought of undressing. A bird was twittering drowsily in the ivy on the house when she rose from the side of the bed and

moved over to the window, drawing back the curtains.

The rain had ceased and a cool, pungent scent rose from the wet earth and dripping trees.

It was warm, too. The world seemed like some great wonderful hothouse filled with rare and beautiful scents upon which one had just opened the closed door.

As she looked at it and the first pink glow of dawn in the face of the grey sky tears filled Eva's eyes.

She had not shed one all night, but now suddenly it was borne home to her what a beautiful place the world really was, and how wonderfully happy one might be . . . if only . . . she was brought up here by a chaos of perplexed, jumbled thoughts.

Life had gone awry with her so suddenly and for no apparent reason; she wondered helplessly if she herself had been to blame, and if so, in what way.

She turned away with the tears running down her face and crept into bed.

And so ended the wonderful honeymoon which had promised so much and fulfilled so little.

## CHAPTER XIX

THE next few days passed on leaden feet; days which to Eva seemed laden with the heavy scent of exotics and the sound of weeping; days which finally ended in a procession to the little churchyard whither Ralph Winterdick was followed to his last resting-place by half the county, and a long service, during which people stared with curious sympathy at Philip and his wife.

And then the blinds were drawn up once more at the Highway House, and life went on again as if there were no empty chair at the head of the table, no empty place in the hearts of the dead man's wife and son.

To Eva these days had been endless torture; she had been left to herself a great deal, and time had hung heavily on her hands. There was nothing for her to do in the house. Philip was always engrossed with business and lawyers, and even had it been otherwise he would not have wanted her; Mrs. Winterdick did not want her either.

So Eva was thrown very much with Tom Calligan; and indeed without him she felt that many times she would have gone mad.

But he was always cheery and kind; when he came into the room where she was she felt somehow the better for his presence; when he left her again she felt her spirits falling once more into their old hopelessness.



"You and Philip ought to go away again now for a week or two," he said to her once. "You both look as if a breath of sea air would do you good."

"Philip would not care to go," Eva said simply.

She looked steadily at Calligan as she spoke; she had quite got over the feeling now that she must always turn her face away whenever she spoke of her husband.

"Besides," she added, "he would not care to leave his mother."

She was beginning to feel that Mrs. Winterdick was of far more consideration to Philip than she herself; in all the world there seemed to be nobody who really cared what she did or what became of her.

Even Peter seemed to have changed in some inexplicable way; or was the change really in herself? She did not know—she gave up trying to puzzle it out.

She only knew that Peter was a great deal at the Arlingtons, and that people were wondering when their engagement would be announced.

She had never dared somehow to speak to Peter about it, and Peter never broached the subject to her.

Mr. Dennison avoided her; he had not been able to remember clearly how far his indiscretion had carried him on her wedding day; and Eva and her mother had never been a great deal to one another.

So Eva was thrown back on her own resources—and Calligan!

Often when she was wandering restlessly about the house or gardens he would hunt her out and carry her off for a walk or drive.

"Where's Philip?" he always asked first, and had grown used to her despondent answer that she did not know.

"Busy, I expect," Calligan would declare cheerfully. "Well, shall I do for a second best?"

He always determinedly ignored the fact that he knew, of any estrangement existing between this girl and his friend, though sometimes it almost broke his heart to see the weary droop of Eva's mouth and the wistfulness of her eyes.

He remembered her as so different. It seemed impossible that she could be the same girl who had looked so radiantly happy on her wedding day, little more than a fortnight ago.

Once he ventured to speak to Philip about it.

"Your wife's looking seedy," he said with elaborate carelessness. "Why don't you take her away for a bit? All this has been rather a strain for her, you know, old chap."

Philip did not look up from the paper he was reading.

"I can't leave just now very well," he said, after a moment. "Besides"—he hesitated—"mother was saying last night that she thought of going to her sister's for a week or two. She wants us to stay and look after the place while she's away."

"I see." Calligan got up and walked over to the window.

What the deuce was the matter with the chap? he asked himself savagely. He could not make Philip out at all. A hundred times it had been on the tip of his tongue to ask his friend point blank, and then something had always stopped him.

After all, it was no business of his.

Philip had lowered the paper now and was looking at Calligan with a sort of rough suspicion in his eyes.

"What's Eva been saying to you?" he asked suddenly.

Calligan turned slowly and returned the gaze steadily.

Philip's eyes fell first and he coloured a little.

"If she finds it dull here, she can go to her own people," he said curtly.

Calligan lost his temper then. "If she'd got any sense, that is what she would do," he said hotly. "It's perfectly obvious that she isn't wanted here, at all events."

He faced his friend defiantly.

Philip was white enough now; he rose to his feet.

"What do you mean?" he demanded passionately.

"I mean what I say," Calligan answered firmly. "And I'm going to say what I mean, before you kick me out of the house. It's—it's abominable the way your wife is treated here . . . she—she . . ." He stopped, stammering, only to rush on again. "What in the wide world has come over you, old man? . . . It's not like you to treat any woman in this fashion . . . Phil, for heaven's sake . . ."

Philip turned on his heel. "Mind your own confounded business," he said savagely. "And talk about something you understand."

He was gone, with a slam of the door. Calligan shrugged his shoulders; he supposed he had done it now; well—it would have come sooner or later anyway; he could not have stood by much longer and tolerated things.

He wondered what time there was a train to London; London and a bachelor flat seemed the two most uninviting things on earth at that moment; he dreaded saying good-bye to Eva.

As he went up to his room to pack his bag he met her on the stairs; she was dressed for walking.

"Wouldn't you like to come with me?" she asked him haltingly, half in fun.

Calligan answered at once that there was nothing he would have preferred, but that he had had an urgent summons back to town and had got to catch the next train.

He was not looking at her as he spoke, or he would have seen the sudden bitter disappointment in her eyes.

"Oh, you're not really going?" she said.

"I'm afraid so; I've been here an unconscionable time as it is."

He glanced at her and quickly away again. There was so much he wanted to say; words came tumbling over one another to his lips, but he drove them back; he went on a step.

"Well—I shall have to be going."

He rushed on, and Eva went slowly downstairs.

She crossed the hall and stood at the front door, looking into the sunny garden with unseeing eyes.

She had got to be left here alone with Philip and his mother, and neither of them wanted her. It seemed a nightmare prospect. Calligan alone had made it bearable. His cheery personality had done more for her than anything else could have done. She could not picture her life here without him.

Philip lounged into the hall. He saw his wife standing there and spoke to her.

"Are you going out?"

She turned. "I was . . ." There was a little pause. "Why is Mr. Calligan going away?" she asked then, shrilly.

Philip looked amazed. "Calligan going away! I didn't know he was going."

He had forgotten about their little breeze of a few moments earlier; he was feeling ill and irritable in these days, and often said hasty things for which he was afterwards bitterly sorry.

"Where is Calligan?" he asked quickly. "I'll stop this. Of course he's not going."

But Calligan went. He stuck to it that he had had an urgent business call; he argued with Philip all the time he was packing his bag. He was beastly sorry, he said, but he really must go.

Philip was scowling fiercely. "Look here," he said at last, "is it because of anything I've said? 'Pon my word, I didn't mean it if I was rude. . . I'm all upside down these days."

There was something pathetic in the ashamed admission.

"It's nothing you've said, sonny," Calligan assured him cheerily. "I've got to go, that's all. . ."

"But why? Tell me why? You've never had a day's business in all your life, so it's no use trying to swank me."

Calligan laughed. "I'm not going to, but there is a reason, all the same, and a very real one."

"Tell me what it is, then."

But Calligan only evaded an answer." He wondered how Philip would like it if he took him at his word and told him: "Because I love your wife—that's why. . . And now what have you got to say!"

## CHAPTER XX

PHILIP himself drove Calligan to the station. He grumbled and growled the whole of the way down. He knew that something he had said was driving his friend from the Highway House.

"There's no earthly reason why you need go back to town," he said for the fiftieth time, as they neared the station.

"If you only knew how glad we are—all of us—to have you."

"It's very decent of you, old chap. I'll come again."

"Stay now—we can just get back in time for dinner."

For a moment Calligan was sorely tempted. He thought of the dining-room at the Highway House, with its long table and oak-panelled walls, and he thought of Eva sitting there in the shaded light in her black frock, and of his own vacant chair . . . but he shook his head vigorously.

"I can't. Thanks, all the same."

They were at the station now. Philip left the car, and the two men walked together on to the platform.

"And if you could get a few days' holiday," Calligan said diffidently as the train steamed in.

Philip laughed.

"Is it for my sake you're urging this—or Eva's?" he asked.

Calligan's honest eyes met his squarely.

"Perhaps—for both," he said.

He got into the carriage and slammed the door. He let the window down with a run and looked out.

Now it had come to the point he hated going. He hated the memory of the sadness in Eva's eyes as she had said good-bye to him. He ventured a last admonishment as he gripped Philip's hand.

"Good-bye, old son, and—I say, buck up, you know. There's lots to live for 'et."

Philip scowled. He had got into a habit of scowling lately.

"I know you think I'm a sweep," he began.

The train was moving swiftly now; a moment, and Calligan was carried beyond reach.

Philip drove home moodily; he was angry because his friend had gone, and angry because he knew that he had driven him away.

He dreaded the thought of the house without him, and now if his mother went away also, as she had talked of doing, it would mean that he and Eva were left entirely alone.

With each passing day life seemed more crudely impossible; with almost every hour young Winterdick realised more acutely that he could not continue to live as he had done during the past fortnight.

He drove home the longest way; he felt sorely tempted to stay out altogether; what was there to go home for? The old house was no longer what it had been; he missed his father bitterly; perhaps nobody had ever guessed what old Winterdick's death had meant to his son.

He came home through the village; as he passed the Arlingtons' house he saw Kitty standing there at the gate with Peter Dennison.

He glanced at them, raised his hat unsmilingly and passed.

The incident irritated him and set him brooding.

Did Kitty mean to marry that boy? It was not that Philip cared in the least whom she married, but he was still conscious of a sort of resentment in his heart against her.

If she had played the game and been what he thought her to be he would never have been landed in this mess. As it was, he was miserable, the sunshine of life seemed to have been wiped clean out of the horizon on his wedding morning; he had lost interest in everything; even his beloved tennis had gone to the wall; only that morning he had looked at his racquet and wondered why on earth he had ever been so keen on the rotten game; there was only one thing now in all the world that mattered, and it was beyond his reach.

He left the car in the drive at the Highway House and went in.

A maid informed him that dinner had been ready some time, and that Mrs. Winterdick had not waited.

Philip was amazed; he looked at his watch and found it was past eight! Until then he had had no idea how the time had flown.

He went straight to the dining-room; his mother was there alone.

Philip stopped in the doorway; he had begun to apologise, but broke off.

"Where's Eva?" he asked, abruptly.

"She had a headache; she asked me to excuse her. I have sent something to her room."

Philip scowled.

"She was all right when Calligan left," he said. There was a rough, unformed suspicion in his mind; he moved towards the table. "You don't mind if I sit down as I am?"

"My dear, of course not."

Philip moved his place round so that he sat beside his mother. A servant brought soup, but he refused it.

"I don't want anything. . . . Oh, very well"—as his mother protested. "Give me a cut from the joint. . . ."

The maid withdrew. Philip leaned back in his chair with a sigh; he looked round the silent room, and his eyes came back to his mother's face with a sort of pathetic tenderness.

"Different from what it used to be, eh?" he said, with an effort.

"Yes. . . ." Mrs. Winterdick's face quivered; she raised her eyes for a moment to her husband's empty chair.

There was a little silence; then she said:

"Philip, do you remember the night you told us that you were going to be married?"

"Yes."

"Do you remember that I wanted you to break off your engagement? That I begged you——"

Philip interrupted:

"Mother—please stop. What's the use of going back to all that? I don't want to hear anything about it. I——" he broke off as the servant re-entered.

He only made a pretence of eating the dinner served to him; as soon as he could he rose to leave the room. Mrs. Winterdick followed him.

"Philip, I want to speak to you."

He hesitated; he knew so well what was coming, but he shrugged his shoulders and followed his mother to the drawing-room.

"Well—fire away," he said laconically.

He stood with his back to the empty fireplace, staring up at the ceiling.

Mrs. Winterdick crossed over to him and linked her arm in his.

"Once upon a time you used to tell me all your troubles, Phil," she said sadly.

He bit a lip; the arm beneath hers suddenly stiffened; then he bent and kissed her lightly.

"I should tell you now, mother mine—if I had any troubles."

"You mean that you are—quite, quite happy!" she asked slowly.

"Of course! At least——" He released himself from her roughly. "Happy! It all depends what you mean by that! I suppose I'm as happy as I deserve to be." He walked away a step and came back, looking down at her sad face fondly. "What brick wall are you up against now!" he asked whimsically.

She put her arms round his neck, holding him so that he could not move; she looked earnestly into his unhappy face.

"Phil—why won't you tell me the truth!" she said painfully.

He tried to protest—tried to insist that there was nothing to tell, but somehow he felt as if he could not keep up the wretched farce of pretence any longer; he broke out passionately:

"I thought you didn't know—I hoped you didn't . . . I've made a mess of everything . . . It's all I can expect, I suppose . . . She—Eva—she doesn't care a hang about me . . . that's the truth!"

"Not care! Phil!"

He laughed wretchedly.

"I suppose you think it's impossible for anyone not to care for me," he said bitterly. "They're not all like you, mother. She told me—on our wedding day as we drove away from the house that she didn't care—that she never had, that . . . oh, what's the use of going into it all! I deserve it——"

"But she looked so happy—everyone remarked how happy she looked—oh, there must be some mistake! . . . Besides—why did she marry you if she didn't care!"

"Because I'm a Winterdick—for what it's worth."

"But . . . but . . . oh, I don't understand . . ."

Phil, strode the length of the room and came back.

"Look here," he said suddenly. "We thought we were jolly clever, didn't we! We thought—you and I and the gov'nor—that we'd fixed things up so that nobody except ourselves and old Dennison would ever know about the . . . the bargain! . . . Well——" He passed a hand over his eyes. "She knows—too," he said.

"Eva!" There was a tone of sharp distress in Mrs. Winterdick's voice. "Oh, no, Phil! Oh, I hope not."

"Well, she does—she knew all along, and was just playing up to us . . . It's just been a case of 'When Greek meets Greek' . . ." He drew a long breath. "So you see, the laugh isn't all on our side after all."

There was a long silence; Philip walked away to the window and stood staring out into the gathering darkness.

"Well," he said then, "haven't you anything to say? What are you thinking?"

"I'm thinking," Mrs. Winterdick said slowly, "how terrible it must all be—for her!"

He wheeled slowly round.

"For—her!" Somehow it had never struck him in this light before; his thoughts and pity had hitherto been chiefly for himself.

"Why for her?" he asked again harshly. "She's all right—she knew what she was doing . . . after all—" He laughed mirthlessly.

"Why is it any worse for her than it is for—me?"

"She's younger than you, Phil; she's little more than a child, and an unsophisticated child at that. Until they came to Apsley she'd never been about or seen anything of the world. If it's true that she married you, knowing what you say she did, I can only pity her; I can't blame her. Poor child! she didn't know what she was throwing away—she didn't realise that some day she might meet a man whom she would care for. . . ." Her voice quivered and she stopped a moment, only to go on brokenly: "Oh, Phil, I always thought that she did love you! I haven't seen you together a great deal, but I watched her, and I was sure she cared—so sure! It made me happier to think that she did. I tried to think that in time you would get to love her too, and then . . ."

Philip laughed dryly.

"You're wasting your sympathies, my dear," he said. "Eva knew quite well what she was doing; she was very frank about it all. I give her credit for that! She told me that she'd never cared for me, and she told me . . ." He stopped with a gesture of passionate intolerance. "Oh, why talk about it! The thing's done, and it can't be undone. After all, we're only like dozens of other people we know. 'I'm not the only man who has married a woman for her money. I . . .'" He stopped.

Married her for her money, had he? when his love for her was an unceasing torment that would not let him rest day or night; when it cut him to the soul with jealousy every time he saw her laughing and happy with Calligan. He squared his shoulders and laughed.

"Don't you worry yourself, my dear," he said more quietly. "We shall shake down all right, I shouldn't be surprised if we're not pointed at all round the country before long as being a model couple!"

And then—because he felt so utterly wretched that he hardly knew how to bear himself—he walked out of the



room, whistling as if he had not a care in the world, and shut the door behind him.

The front door stood open to the dusky night, and, remembering that he had left the car standing in the drive, Philip went out to take it round to the garage.

As he was leaving the yard he heard the sound of voices, followed by a laugh.

He hesitated and listened; then he turned. From an open stable on the right a light shone out, a long yellow shaft in the darkness, and by that light he could see his wife, with her arm round the satiny neck of one of his father's horses, talking to a groom.

She made a pretty picture standing there, bareheaded, and with the inefficient light shining all about her. Philip caught the gleam of a diamond on the hand that caressed the horse's neck and heard her voice distinctly as he stood outside, uncertain what to do.

"We used to keep horses at home, you know, Williams—no, I don't mean here at Apsley—this never really seems home to me, somehow. We only have cars here—and I'm not very fond of motoring. But at home—our real home, I mean, before we got rich—we had an old brown cob. Dandy his name was, and he used to come when I called him, and——" She broke off. Philip had moved forward and was standing in the doorway.

Eva's arm slipped down from the horse's neck and she fell back a step.

Williams hurriedly grabbed up the harness he was cleaning and bolted. There was a moment of silence.

"I thought you had a headache," Philip said. "My mother told me that you were in bed with a headache."

"I wasn't in bed; my head ached, and I didn't want any dinner, that was all."

His eyes sought hers suspiciously, but she stood with her back to the light, and her face was in shadow.

"Do you often come here and make a confidant of Williams?" Philip asked then.

There was a sneer in his voice, but it was not intended; he was holding himself in a grip of iron, and his heart was burning with jealousy—jealousy even of his own groom, a slip of a lad with a freckled face and slow tongue, with whom this girl preferred to talk.

She answered him quite calmly, though she had flushed a little at his tone.

"I do sometimes . . . He loves horses, and so do I!"

"You mean that I don't . . ."

"I have heard you say a great many times that you prefer a car."

She moved past him to the door. She was quite

mistress of herself; she walked quietly and naturally; she hummed a little snatch of song under her breath as she went.

The little sound of indifference and composure maddened young Winterdick; his hands were clenched into fists as he followed her.

"Mr. Calligan has gone, I suppose?" she asked casually.

She half looked over her shoulder as she spoke, and for the first time Philip could see her face distinctly in the yellow light from the stable, and he saw that her eyes were red and swollen with crying. The little unformed suspicion that had stirred in his heart many times of late woke again; the smouldering fire burst into a flame as he caught her arm in a rough grasp.

"So that's why you wouldn't come down to dinner," he said brutally. "Because you've been crying your eyes out for him."

Eva did not answer; she looked past her husband into the darkness of the garden beyond, and something very like despair settled on her heart.

Every day seemed but to add to the estrangement between them; she wondered dully how much longer this state of things could go on.

"Please leave go of my arm," she said quietly. "You hurt me."

Philip gave a stifled exclamation and released her, but when she turned to walk away he followed.

"I want to speak to you," he said; his voice was still rough and surly; her very composure maddened him. "We shall have to come to some arrangement. I'm sick to death of going on as we are. It's an intolerable situation for me——"

She interrupted wearily.

"If you shout so all the grooms will hear."

"I don't care if they do—everyone will know sooner or later." He was walking beside her now, and they had gone beyond the yellow glow of light from the stables, and were in darkness again. "What is it you want me to do?" he broke out passionately. "You never speak to me if you can help it—you seem to spend your time avoiding me."

"I thought you would prefer it. I have tried not to be a tie to you."

Her voice shook a little.

"You were crying to-night because Calligan has gone," said Philip violently. "You can't deny it——"

"I don't want to deny it. He was very kind to me."

"I dare say he would have stayed if he had known you were so keen on his staying if you had asked him."

"I did ask him——"

"You asked him . . ." Philip's voice was furious.

Eva stood still. She felt as if she were at the end of her tether. It was agony to be with Philip and keep up the pretence; she could hardly believe that it was her own voice speaking as she broke out:

"I am not going to be ordered about by you. I am not going to be dictated to as to my choice of friends. I haven't bothered you—I never ask what you do, or who you spend your time with. I've kept my share of the bargain, and you've no right to expect anything more . . ."

"You're my wife, and I've a right to object to your allowing Calligan or any other man to make love to you . . . If I'd known this before he left the house . . ."

"How dare you!" Eva was trembling all over, her hands were clenched; she felt as if she could have struck him; to add insult to injury like this. He was not content with having wounded her to the quick once, but must needs strike again.

Her voice rose in passionate trembling.

"If you ever dare to say a thing like that to me again," she said sobbingly, "I'll leave you and never come back again as long as I live. . ." Her voice broke, and she turned and ran blindly from him into the darkness.

There was no intention in her mind except to get away; to put distance between herself and Philip; but she ran on and out of the gate and down the road until breathless and worn out she had to stop. A sudden dread of the Highway House and everything to do with it overwhelmed her. She had looked forward so so much happiness within its walls, and the few days that she had spent there had seemed like an eternity of desolation.

Presently she went on again blindly sobbing as she went. It was unconsciously that her feet carried her towards her father's house. She went round the garden to a side door which she knew was generally unfastened. As she reached it it was opened from inside and Peter came out.

He did not see his sister, but she called his name faintly as he would have passed her.

He pulled up shortly.

"Eva! Good heavens!" he groped through the darkness and found her hand, drawing it through his arm.

"I was thinking about you," he said; and now there was a sort of self-consciousness in his voice. "I want to tell you something—you so seldom come over. . ." He

seemed struck by her silence. He bent towards her, trying to see her face.

"Is anything the matter?" he asked quickly.

"N—no . . . but I wanted to see you, too, Peter. Why don't you ever come over to us?"

He laughed rather constrainedly. "I never feel at home with the Winterdicks," he said candidly. "They're too grand for me. . . Oh, I know Philip's all right—I've nothing against him, but—well, I don't think he cares very much about me."

"It's just imagination."

"Is it——" He hunched his shoulders. "Perhaps it is. Anyway, I always feel out of things over there——"

"You might come—if only for my sake."

He gave her hand a squeeze. "Poor old Bonnie!"

Her lips quivered. "Why do you say that?" she asked. She tried to laugh. "Most people are busy envying me."

"Are they?"

A subtle note in his voice sent a little thrill of apprehension through her heart; she drew her hand away.

"Peter, what are you thinking? Why did you say I was poor?"

"I didn't mean it—I don't know why I said it. Don't let's argue." He almost sounded as if he were trying to change the subject. "I've got something to tell you—something—very—important."

"Yes." She was only half listening, her thoughts were in a whirl. Did Peter guess that her marriage had been such a tragedy?

"What is it?" she asked with an effort.

Peter cleared his throat vigorously. "It's—I dare say you'll laugh—I know I'm young, but I'm not too young to know my own mind . . ."

"Peter!" She knew what was coming now, and there was a little note of distress in her voice.

Peter took instant offence. "If you're going to preach I'm going back. I thought you would be sympathetic at least—the mater made an awful scene when I told her—she never liked Kitty . . ."

"But, Peter—you're so young—she's much older than you are."

"Pooh! Just a year or two, and I'm sure she doesn't look it. Anyway, I'm engaged to her, and . . ."

Eva gave a cry of protest. "She can't love you—it's just because she thinks we've got money . . . 'oh, Peter!"

Peter drew a hard breath. "If anybody but you had said that I'd never forgive it," he said quietly. "You may call me a boy—perhaps I am to you—but I love Kitty,

and I'm going to marry her. I thought you didn't like her. I suppose it's just because she's so pretty . . ."

"Peter!"

"Sorry, Bonnie—I didn't mean that, dear. I know you're not jealous and paltry like that."

There were tears in Eva's eyes. Though for weeks she had seen how attentive Peter had been to Kitty she had never thought it could come to this.

"You'll never be happy with her," she said half crying. "Why, Peter—" she tried to laugh—"it's only a little while ago that you were asking me if she—if she—was engaged to Philip. Don't you remember?"

"She could have been if she'd liked," Peter said quickly without thinking. "He asked her and she refused him. . . . Oh, Bonnie, I'm sorry. I never meant to tell you, but you made me."

There was a poignant silence.

"It's all right, dear," Eva said then very gently. "You—you haven't told me anything I—I didn't know. . . . Go on—what were you saying?"

Peter put an arm about her. He bent and rubbed his head against her shoulder.

"It's all over and done with, anyway," he said remorsefully. "I'm glad you knew, though. It was decent of Philip to have told you. Of course, I can't blame him. Any fellow would like Kitty. . . . I don't know what she can see in me. I know I'm not half good enough for her."

Eva clenched her teeth. She felt an insane desire to scream out to him—

"It's money she sees. She only wants money from you, just as it was all that Philip wanted from me. . . . Don't do it, Peter. If you only knew how it will hurt when you find out that it's only our money and not us that they want!"

But she kept silent.

"The old man was rather glad on the whole," Peter went on presently. "He said I was a bit young, of course, and that we must wait a year or two—but he didn't object—he said he'd always liked Kitty."

"Yes."

"And you'll like her, too, when you get to know her better. She's fond of you—she's said so heaps of times, but she doesn't think you like her, and she thinks it's because Philip once. . . . Well, you know."

"She needn't think that—" said Eva stiffly.

"No, I know; I was sure of that. Philip and you are married, and the other is all over and done with." His

arm tightened about her a little. "After all, he's a lucky dog; he's got the best wife in the world."

"Thank you, Peter."

"So he has—and if he doesn't think so. . . . Bonnie! Will you go and see Kitty one day? She'd be pleased—"

"Yes, I'll go—of course I will." She laughed with a sudden recklessness. "What a lot has happened in a little while, Peter! I'm married, and you're engaged, and to two people whom we thought cared for each other. . . . Isn't it a funny world, Peter?"

"I think it's rather a nice world," Peter said soberly. "Here we are—shall I come in, Bonnie?"

"Oh, do—of course."

They went up the winding drive together; a light from a window shone out into the darkness; Eva crossed the hall and pushed the library door wide. Philip was there alone; he did not look particularly pleased when he saw his brother-in-law.

"Peter's got some news," Eva said. She looked at her husband with hard, bright eyes.

"Peter's engaged to Kitty Arlington," she said.

There was a sharp silence; Philip looked dumbfounded, then—

"Rot!" he said, shortly.

The blank amazement in his face was comical. Eva began to laugh hysterically.

"It's true," she said. "Isn't it, Peter? Tell him yourself."

"It's quite true," Peter said sulkily. "And you're not very polite," he added offendedly.

Philip pulled himself together with an effort.

"I beg your pardon, old chap—I'm sorry—but I was so surprised—I never thought. . . ."

He held out his hand. "Congratulations," he said, heartily.

"Thank you." Peter began to smile again; he was very much of a boy still. "Thanks, awfully. . . ."

He went off a little later in the best of spirits.

"I'm going to bring Kitty over one day," he said.

"Do," said Philip grimly.

He was wondering why he was so little moved at this unexpected announcement; it only showed that he had never really cared for her, of course—he went back to the room where Eva waited with a sort of abashed look in his eyes.

She was turning the pages of a book, but as her husband came into the room again she put it down and walked to the door: Philip reached it in a couple of strides, shut it and put his back to it.

"You're not going yet. I—I beg your pardon for what I said this evening—it was—was an infernally caddish thing to have said. Will you forgive me?"

"You need not have apologized——"

He flushed crimson. "You mean that nothing I can say or do affects you?"

"I mean that I have forgotten it."

"Very well, then, you can say you forgive me."

Her eyes searched his face indifferently.

"Certainly—if you wish me to."

She turned and went back to her book. Philip waited a moment, then crossed the room and snatched the book from her.

"If you're trying to drive me mad, you're succeeding admirably," he said hoarsely. "You never used to be like this. Eva—for Heaven's sake. . . Don't you see that I'm nearly at the end of my tether? I can't go on like this—I can't. I'll do anything you want—anything, if only you'll try not to despise me so. We'll leave the Highway House—the agreement with your father can be destroyed and the money refunded. I'll work—I'll do anything, but I can't stand being treated like this. Eva—you used to like me once—I know you did. . . and, after all, you're my wife——"

She turned her face sharply away. "I wish you would't make such scenes—it's so useless. I thought we understood one another. . . I haven't asked you to pretend to care for me. . ."

"It's not pretence," he broke out violently. "I love you—I'd give my right hand if I could make you love me. . ."

For a moment she did not move, then: "And—Kitty Arlington?" she asked slowly.

Philip clenched his hands. "Who has been talking about her? She's nothing to me."

"You asked her to marry you."

"I was a fool—she threw me over at the first hint of trouble—it was only the things I could give her that she wanted. When I told her that the gov'nor. . ." He broke off, realising too late what he had done.

Eva had risen to her feet. "So it was only then!" She laughed bitterly. "She threw you over one day, and you came to me the next!" She swept him a mocking courtesy.

"I am indeed highly honoured."

"I don't want to speak of her; she's utterly heartless; it's not in her to care for anybody. If she marries Peter it will only be for his money."

There was a burning spot of colour in Eva's cheeks; her eyes seemed to blaze.

"She will marry him, in fact—for the same reason that you married me," she said cuttingly.

Philip looked at his wife in silent fury, then he burst out in a blaze of passion: "How dare you speak to me like that! You were as much to blame as I was. You told me yourself that you married me caring for another man. If I married you for your money you married me for something you wanted equally as much. . . ."

"You mean your name—your exalted position. . . ." She laughed bitterly. "Very well, then, I suppose we are quits. There's no need to go on with this—hateful argument. I don't think I started it—I never want to mention it again—"

"You threw it up at me about Kitty Arlington," he said sulkily.

"I know I did, because I hate to feel that she's only going to marry Peter as second best. It's no use my telling Peter—he won't believe me. She'll never make him happy—she's too selfish, too—"

"Women are all the same," said Philip.

Eva had never meant to be drawn into this discussion at all. She was appalled now to realise how she must have changed during the past three weeks to ever be able to speak to him like this—to be able to sneer at him—the man she loved with her whole heart.

"And I shall get worse and worse," she told herself hopelessly. "As long as we are together things can only get worse and worse. If I could only go away and try to forget it all."

Philip had paced the length of the room and come back again. He looked at Eva with unhappy eyes.

"We seem to be a fine pair," he said, laughing mirthlessly. "You marry me, caring for another man. . . ."

She flushed hotly.

"The man I cared for never knew it, and wouldn't have cared if he had," she said quickly. "If he had done, I would have stuck to him if he hadn't had a shilling in the world. Do you think I would have put money and—and wretched things like that—first?"

She laughed shakily.

"So I did the next best thing," she said again. "Because I could not do what I wanted, I didn't deliberately throw over someone I loved for your money, as you did for . . ."

"It's a confounded lie! I never threw Kitty Arlington over. I would have married her if she would have had me. Ask her, and see if she'll deny it. I told her what



my position was. I begged her not to chuck me up, and she only laughed—said she couldn't bear to be poor, said . . . oh, what does it matter what she said!"

He looked at his wife with stormy eyes, and was struck by the story pallor of her face.

Somehow, in spite of all that she had suffered since her wedding day, Eva had never suspected the truth to be so bad as this. That Philip should never have loved her had been a terrible thought, but that he should have cared for someone else all the time was the crowning blow.

She drew a long breath, and for a moment closed her eyes; then she said, with an effort:

"Well, at least you are honest, and I know now where I am. It only remains to be seen who can bear it the longest . . . Somehow I—somehow I don't think it will be me."

"What do you mean?" . . . I've told you nothing fresh—if you think you are the only one who is having the devil's own time, I can tell you that you're not. I'd give ten years of my life to be able to go back and undo all this."

Eva turned her head away; every word he spoke was like a blow on her heart.

Philip blundered on in his man's stupidity. "With regard to your brother—"

She turned on him with a little cry.

"He shall never marry her. I couldn't bear it; I couldn't stand by and know that all the time you—and she . . . Oh, you can't really care for her if you can even think of allowing it; if you can even think of letting Peter bring her here. . ." She was sobbing now, tearless sobs that seemed to rend her.

"Eva . . ."

Philip put his hands on her shoulders, turning her face to the light so that he could read her expression; he was rather pale and there was a struggling uncertainty in his eyes.

"You think—you don't think that I still care a hang for that girl, do you?" he said hoarsely. "I don't—I swear to you on my word of honour that it won't give me the slightest pang to see her married to Peter or any other man in the world. . . You—Eva!"—he spoke her name now with a sort of cry—"you do believe me—don't you?"

Something in his voice almost broke her down; she wanted to believe him; then ugly memory rose before her, his words rang again in her ears:

"I would have married her if she would have had me.

... I begged her not to chuck me, and she only laughed.

Such a little while ago! Such a few weeks. . . Was it possible for a man to forget so soon?

She forced her eyes to his face. She even managed a laugh.

"Believe you? No, I'm afraid I don't."

Philip let her go. He felt mechanically for his cigarette case, selected one and lit it. Then he sat down on the arm of a big chair and laughed.

"It's as good as a play, isn't it?" he said. "I've seen many worse shows on the stage. . ."

He waited a moment.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked then, more quietly.

"I—oh, nothing! I'm quite satisfied to make the best of things—if you are. . . Surely—we might—might be—friends. We used to get on all right—once."

She tried to speak quietly, but her voice shook.

Philip looked at her beneath drawn brows, then suddenly he rose, went over to her and looked down into her white face with a sort of sorrow in his eyes.

"This—other man," he said unevenly. "Did you—do you . . . care—very much?"

She tried to meet his eyes, but could not; and with a little stifled sound she covered her face with her hands.

"Oh, I did—I did," she said in a broken whisper.

Philip walked over to the door and opened it, then came back irresolutely.

"Eva may I. . . ? Will you answer me one question?"

"Yes."

"Look at me, then."

She raised her eyes.

"It's not . . . it isn't Calligan—is it?" There was an agonised question in his voice.

"Mr. Calligan!" She laughed. "Why, I hardly know him. You know, I never saw him till—till just before we were married."

"No—no, of course not." Philip tried to pull himself together. "I'm sorry—I'm a fool. Of course, it couldn't be he."

He waited, as if hoping she would speak, but she did not, and after a moment he went away.

## CHAPTER XXI

THINGS went on monotonously for the next few days, till Philip's mother went away.

"I hope you don't mind my leaving you like this," she said, almost timidly, to Eva. "But I feel that I want a change. There are so many sad memories for me in this house." Her face quivered a little, and Eva felt a sudden longing to put her arms round Mrs. Winterdick's neck and kiss her and tell how sorry she was.

But the feeling of reserve and shyness had never worn off between the two women.

"I want you to feel it is your home, my dear—your own home," Mrs. Winterdick said earnestly. "Do just as you like, and be as happy as you can."

She turned away quickly, without waiting for a reply, and Eva wondered a little.

"Be as happy as you can." What had she meant by that? She went back to the house despondently.

Sometimes she had wished Philip's mother out of the house, but before one day had gone she was wishing her back again.

Philip was out from morning till night, and now Peter was engaged he spent all his time with Kitty.

"I haven't anyone—not anyone!" Eva told herself, desolately. She thought of Tom Calligan with a very real heartache. He had always been pleased to be with her.

"But I used to think that about Philip, too," she reminded herself bitterly. "So perhaps Mr. Calligan was only pretending as well."

One afternoon Peter brought Kitty to tea. He pretended to be disappointed when he found that Philip was out, but he was secretly relieved. He adored Kitty with all the passion of a boy's first love, and he hated to feel that Philip had once, perhaps, adored her, too.

Kitty was very sweet to him. She told Eva that she had never been so happy in all her life. This was said with a downward sweep of long lashes. "Were you very angry when you knew?" she asked, ingenuously.

"Angry!" Eva echoed. "Why should I be angry? I only want Peter to be happy."

Peter was not in the room then.

"I shall do my best," Kitty answered meekly, but beneath her veiled eyes there shone an angry little light.

The Highway House seemed more beautiful to her than ever now she knew herself finally dethroned; there was something about it that all the Dennisons' wealth had failed to impart to their palatial mansion. It angered her, too, that Eva seemed so much at home and was yet quite unchanged.

"And you?" she asked deliberately. "I hope you are very happy! Philip is such a dear—of course, I have known him—oh! ever so long."

"Yes," said Eva directly, "so Philip told me. He will be sorry to have missed you."

"We must see a great deal of one another now, you and I," Kitty declared. "After all, we shall almost be sisters."

Eva did not answer. Next to her husband, she loved Peter best in the world, and it seemed a tragedy to her that he was wasting his affection on this girl.

She looked after them mournfully when later they left the house, Kitty was clinging to Peter's arm and looking up into his face from beneath her shady hat.

"If only he didn't care for her so much," Eva thought, but she knew Peter well enough to know that for the present at all events his life was bound up with Kitty's.

She went out into the garden. The glory of summer was already departing; the leaves had lost their freshness, and the flowerbeds were growing a little wild and rank.

Eva thought of the coming winter and wondered how she would manage to get through it; the long dark evenings, with nothing to do—nobody to be with.

Only a month ago and she had believed that it would be heaven to be Philip's wife, and live in his home, but now she could laugh at the folly of the thought.

Mr. Dennison had questioned her several times about the house in town which he was to give them for a wedding present, but Eva always put him off.

"We'll wait a little while, Daddy," she said. "Things are all so unsettled. We shall stay at the Highway House for the winter I think, anyway. Philip seems to want to be at home."

Mr. Dennison growled.

"Wants to be at home, does he?" he said ironically. "I should have thought it was just the other way on, if you ask me. I never see you two together—never see him at all, if it comes to that. What's he do with himself all the time? Where does he get to?"

Eva's colour rose.

"He has a great deal to see to—his father's affairs, you know," she defended Philip.

Mr. Dennison frowned. He looked at his daughter uneasily.

"Don't you give him too free a hand, my girl," he said.

"Begin as you mean to go on, that's my idea. Why don't you go with him if he has to go here, there and everywhere? You've lost half your spirits since you were married."

Eva laughed.

"Oh, father, what nonsense!"

"It's a fact, all the same," he insisted. "I shall speak to Philip about it when I see him."

"Father, you wouldn't dare. I won't allow it." Eva was frightened. "I'm all right. There's nothing the matter. It's been rather depressing at the Highway House since we came back, that's all. Now Mrs. Winterdick is away things will be better."

Mr. Dennison said "Humph" rather sceptically.

His conscience was uneasy where Eva was concerned.

## CHAPTER XXII

EVA was having breakfast the following morning when the door opened and Philip walked into the room.

He said "Good morning" rather hurriedly, and sat down at the head of the table.

"I saw your father last night," he said.

"Father!" there was a note of dismay in Eva's voice.

"Yes." Across the table Philip's eyes met hers. "What have you been saying to him?" he asked.

"I! Nothing! Is it likely! . . . He told me I was not looking very well—he said he should speak to you about it, and I asked him not to. It's all nonsense, I am quite well."

"He thinks you are moped to death here." His face twisted wryly. "He insinuated that I had not fulfilled my share of the bargain, by doing my best to make you happy. . . . It was impossible to explain to him that I have never been allowed the opportunity."

Eva flushed. "I thought we had agreed not to discuss this any more. There is nothing to be gained by it—" Philip went on heedlessly.

"Your father says that people are talking. He complains that we are never seen about together. He made himself thoroughly unpleasant."

"I am sorry. I suppose it is one of the penalties you have got to pay—my having a father, I mean."

Philip pushed his plate away. "Your father thinks you would be happier in London. He says you want more life. He thinks that the Highway House is dull."

Eva laughed rather tremulously.

"Poor daddy! It was his ambition to get me here, and now his one idea seems to get me out of it."

"He is very keen on this town house business," Philip said, rather wearily. He looked at his wife. "What do you think?"

"I am quite happy here. I have no wish to go to town. I have no friends there—none that you would care for, at least."

"You would rather stay here, then?"

"I will do whichever you like."

A half-sneer crossed his handsome face. "You will, in fact, be a dutiful wife, is that it?" he asked, cynically.

She made no reply. Philip rose. He had hardly touched his breakfast.

"Mr. Dennison seems to have set his heart on a place of some sort or another in London," he said again. "A flat might not be so bad . . ."

"Very well. I will tell him that we should prefer a flat . . ."

Philip pushed a chair out of his way so violently that it went crashing to the floor.

"It's as you wish—it's your money—it's nothing to do with me," he said. "I'm sick of the whole affair. Wherever we go it will be the same. I'd clear off abroad, only if I did I suppose everyone would say that I had deserted you."

Eva was white to the lips. "You need not let that consideration stop you," she said faintly.

"I suppose you mean that you would be glad to see the last of me." He walked over to the window and stood glowering out into the garden, hands deep-thrust into his pockets.

There was a long silence. Philip swung round.

"For Heaven's sake, say something!" he said irritably. "You used to have plenty of spirit, and it's for you to decide what we are to do—stay here or go to town."

"Your mother will hate it if you leave her."

"My mother will agree it is only right that I should do what my wife wishes. If we have the flat we can still come here—if we have the flat there will be no need for you to have to put up with my company all the year round. You can stay there while I am here if you like, and vice versa."

"I will tell father that we have decided to have the flat," Eva said. She hesitated. "I suppose you will

come with us to choose it! If you don't, fa'her will think it strange . . ."

Philip laughed. "Does it matter what he thinks! Anyway, he can have no opinion of a so'-in-law whom he has to keep. I remember you told me once that my people looked down on yours; the boot should be on the other foot, I'm thinking."

The ready tears sprang to the girl's eyes; she hated the hard unhappiness of his voice, and the knowledge that nothing she could do or say would comfort him in the least.

"We will go home after breakfast, then, if that will suit you . . . and see father."

He turned moody eyes on her. "You still call it your 'home,' then," he said irritably. "One would have thought that here—in my house . . ." He laughed again. "You see, I still sometimes forget that it is yours, by right of purchase."

Eva did not answer; these moods of his tried her terribly. Sometimes for days he seemed quite himself, and never made any reference to the cloud between them.

Things were easier for her then; it was only when he showed this restless unhappiness and bitterness that she felt it increasingly difficult to keep up the game of pretence.

"We shall be near Calligan, that's one thing," Philip said suddenly.

He was looking at Eva now, and she flushed at this unexpected reference to his friend, but she answered quietly enough.

"Yes, that will be nice." Philip laughed.

## CHAPTER XXIII

WITH plenty of money at one's disposal, few things are difficult, and the Winterdicks found a flat to their choice easily enough.

"Spend what you like—make it look top-hole, and I'll be pleased," Mr. Dennison told them. "I give you carte . . ." He had intended to say "carte blanche," but was uncertain how to pronounce the second word, so wisely refrained from trying. "I give you a free hand," he substituted. "Money's no object—I promised I'd do the thing in style, and there you are."

He looked at Philip for approval, but Philip had turned away.

With every day he felt his position more acutely. Generous and good-natured as his father-in-law had proved, Philip disliked him more as time went on. It was gall and wormwood to him to think of the agreement between them. At first it had not seemed to matter; he had accepted it more or less philosophically, but since he had grown to love his wife it had seemed an intolerable shame.

He took little or no interest in the purchase of the furniture and the scheme of decoration. Once or twice he went with Eva to the shops, but he was so obviously disinterested that she gave up asking him to accompany her.

Her first delight in it had all died. This was not a "home" which they were preparing, but just a place with four walls and a door.

Once when she appealed to Philip as to what were his favourite colours, he shrugged his shoulders:—

"I don't care—anything—please yourself. . . ."

He did not mean to be cruel. He believed that she was absolutely indifferent to him, and that she despised him with all her heart.

Sometimes he found himself looking at her and marveling that she had so greatly changed. It seemed impossible that he had once been remorseful because he thought she cared for him.

One night at dinner, when Eva had just returned from a shopping expedition to London, he said irreverently:—

"Do you remember that dinner party the mater gave before we were married?"

She raised startled eyes. "Yes—when Kitty Arlington fainted."

Philip frowned. "I wasn't thinking of that. I was thinking of the drive home afterwards." He leaned a little forward, his face flushing. "It didn't seem much like pretence then did it?" he asked.

She met his eyes steadily. "I think we were both rather clever," she said lightly.

Philip looked at his wife with challenging eyes.

"I wonder what we would both give to be able to go back to that night!" he said.

"I wonder!" Eva was peeling a peach. She kept her eyes steadily on her task. She wondered what he would say if he knew what a contrast the unhappy, shrinking soul of her was to the girl he could see in her dainty evening frock who looked so calm and spoke so indifferently. What he would say were she to give way to the almost overpowering longing in her heart to rush round to him and sob out all her loneliness and misery. No doubt he would be horribly embarrassed. No doubt



he would ring for the maid or something. . . . She laughed feverishly at the thought.

"We must have some more dinner parties when we are settled in town," she said. "I hope you have lots of friends, Philip. I mean to be very gay."

She felt herself to be just an onlooker, watching with wide eyes of amazement, listening with astonished ears to this other girl who was Mrs. Philip Winterdick, this other girl who was striving desperately to make some sort of a thing of life out of the ruins of her dreams.

Philip did not answer, but his eyes turned involuntarily to his father's empty chair, and Eva flushed crimson.

She knew what his thoughts must be, and she hated her new, other self who had spoken so flippantly.

"I'm getting horrid—horrid!" she thought, in despair. "What will become of me?"

She broke into the silence desperately. "There's the carpet to choose for your smoking-room, Philip. Hadn't you better choose it yourself instead of leaving it to me? A man's taste is so different to a woman's."

He roused himself with an effort. "Oh, choose anything—can't the man at the shop tell you the right sort of thing?"

"Oh, yes, I dare say he can," she said indifferently. "I only wondered if you wouldn't prefer to choose it yourself."

"I shan't notice if there's a carpet or not," Philip said hardily.

She remembered his words the next afternoon when she was in the empty smoking-room at the flat.

Most of the other rooms were decorated and furnished—she had so hoped that Philip would take a little interest in this one at least.

She looked round her with heavy eyes; the empty place depressed her—the rumble of the distant traffic seemed to be miles and miles away.

Eva clasped her hands together feverishly.

"And all my life will be like this—always," she thought in sudden panic.

With every day she and Philip only grew farther apart; she knew that Philip was changing even as she herself was; he was more cynical, less contented, and she was powerless to prevent it.

She wondered why he had alluded to the night of that dinner-party before their marriage.

Her cheeks burned as she remembered how on that homeward drive she had put her arms round his neck and kissed him—she covered her face with her trembling hands, and suddenly she felt the tears on her fingers.

She had been so happy then—life had been like a beautiful flower slowly unfolding its petals before her; and now . . . she looked round the empty rooms—empty, as her whole future must be!

Looking back to the first night of their marriage, she wondered that Philip had ever troubled to pretend that he cared for her. She remembered how nearly she had been tempted to believe in him; how for a moment at least she had trembled on the brink—she felt that she could never be thankful enough that she had finally turned a deaf ear to his entreaties.

She left the empty room and went across to the one which she had chosen for her own. The dainty silk curtains were drawn, but a ray of September sunlight filtered through and lay like a bar of gold on the carpet. It was complete now, down to the smallest detail, and only waiting for its mistress.

"If only things had been just a little, little different," she thought, wildly. She turned away, her heart bursting with bitterness and sorrow, and as she crossed the hall to the front door, which she had left half open behind her a man pushed it wide and stepped into the hall.

"Jove, what luck! I thought I should find you here," he said, delightedly, and Eva looked up through her tears into Tom Calligan's face.

## CHAPTER XXIV

THERE WAS a moment of tense silence, then Calligan took a quick step towards her.

"Philip," he said insistently, "is he—isn't he here?"

She shook her head. She could not trust herself to speak. She was brushing the tears away childishly with her knuckles. She turned away, fighting hard for her composure.

Calligan hesitated; then he followed her. He put out his hand as if to touch her, but drew it away again.

"Oh, my dear," he said agitatedly: "What is it? What is it?"

"N-nothing—really n-nothing—please!"

He drew in his breath hard. He walked away to the open door and for a moment stood looking into the street outside.

Presently he spoke, rather mechanically:

"I heard you'd taken this flat—a man Philip knows at the club told me—so I came along. I suppose you're not settled in yet?"

"No." She had mastered herself, though her voice was a little shaky still. "It's nearly finished, though." She choked back a lump in her throat. "I'm afraid I'm very rude—I didn't say how glad I was to see you."

He looked at her and quickly away again.

"I've thought of you—often," he said in an odd jerky voice.

"I've thought about you, too," Eva said, trying to smile. "It was horrid after you left."

"Was it?" He found it impossible to be natural. "I'm glad you're coming to town," he added with an effort. "The Highway House won't be too cheerful this winter."

"No—and Mrs. Winterdick has gone away now, you know."

"Has she—and—and—Philip?"

"Oh, Philip's very busy; he has had all his father's affairs to see to."

"Yes."

There was an awkward silence.

There was a puzzled pucker on the girl's forehead. She was vaguely conscious of the constraint between herself and this man, but could not understand or account for it.

She had spoken the truth when she said she was glad to see him. She was only ashamed that he should have seen her tears and distress.

"I'm a bad hostess," she said with an effort. "I ought to ask you in—but I was just going, and so . . ."

"I'll come with you," he interposed hurriedly. He did not want to see the flat, and he was afraid to trust himself alone with her. He had known when he left the Highway House that Eva had been the great attraction for him there, he had not guessed till to-day how strong his love for her had grown.

"We'll go and get some tea, shall we?" he said again. "I've nothing to do. Are you going back to Apsley to-night?"

"Oh, yes—I've had to come up a great deal lately to see to furniture and things."

They were outside now, and Calligan had shut the door of the flat behind them with a little slam.

They set off together down the road.

There was nothing much in Calligan. He had no especial good looks to recommend him; he was just an ordinary cheerful, kind-hearted young man. But before he and Eva had reached the teashop he had made her feel happier than she had done since he said good-bye to her down at Apsley.

When they were facing one another across the round table, Eva said frankly:—

"I don't know what it is about you, but you always make me feel very pleased with myself, Mr. Calligan. . ."

"Do I!" He coloured to the roots of his hair. "It's kind of you to say so . . . Jove! what rum looking cakes."

The cakes were quite ordinary, but Calligan felt that he must change the subject at any cost. He did not want to talk about himself or about Eva.

Deep down in his heart he knew that he was beginning to hate Philip Winterdick, but for the moment he wanted to put the knowledge aside.

"What have you been doing since I saw you?" Eva asked him. "It seems so long ago. . ."

He laughed, not very naturally.

"I haven't done anything worth talking about. I've been to the club most evenings—once or twice to a theatre. I'm a lazy beggar, you know."

"Are you? Then I suppose I must be, too, because I don't seem to have done anything either. I can't even interfere with the household arrangements as I used to at home. I just wander about—go for walks—"

"And play tennis," he interrupted, smiling.

She shook her head.

"I've never played since I was married." There was a note of wonderment in her voice.

"You'll find the time pass more quickly when you're up in town," he told her. "We shall have to do some theatres. Do you like theatres?"

"Oh, yes. . ."

"Good! Well, I'll take you. I—" He broke off. He had not intended to say this.

"Philip will have to take you to all the shows," he added, lamely.

Philip! Her husband's name gave Eva a faint shock. She had almost forgotten him during the last few minutes.

"I hope you'll come and see us often," she said, with a touch of anxiety in her voice. "I mean to keep open house. I tell Philip that I mean to be so gay—so gay. . . ." She stopped, the contrast between the words she was uttering and the black devastation in her heart striking her with bitter force.

His eyes met hers gravely across the table.

"I shall be delighted," he said formally.

"You won't find Philip has altered in the least," she rushed on. "He isn't a bit the stay-at-home, settle-down sort of married man. We're quite a sensible couple—he goes his way and I go mine. It's such an excellent way to arrange things don't you think?" she asked defiantly.

"Excellent," said Calligan with an effort.

He had kept his eyes downbent, but now he raised them, and for a moment they met Eva's.

It was only a moment, but long enough for him to read the whole tragedy in her bravely smiling face. She would die rather than tell him, he knew, that her marriage with Philip Winterdick had been a mistake—a terrible mistake, without remedy.

He looked away from her with a sick feeling of helplessness.

"I'm quite ready if you are," she was saying composedly.

"How many cakes have we had? Three each! Oh, how greedy."

She laughed and chatted with him till the last moment, but just as the Apsley train was moving, and Calligan had stepped back a little, she suddenly held her hand to him through the open window.

"Come and see me soon—come soon," she said with a little note of entreaty in her voice.

She cared nothing for Calligan, save that he was always kind to her, and that to-day he had given her a grip of herself again. He, at least, was pleased to be with her, and the last weeks had been a nightmare of loneliness.

She would have been amazed and afraid could she have known the tumultuous feeling in Calligan's heart as he walked blindly out of the station.

He had seen her again; it seemed now that he had only lived for this meeting.

She had been glad to see him, he knew, as he recalled her frank words—

"I don't know what it is about you, but you always make me feel very pleased with myself."

He could not bear to remember the grief in her face, and the pathos of this wife of little more than a month, making her home alone, and with tears.

Was Philip a brute after all? Had the years of their friendship blinded him to the true character of this man whom Eva had married?

Calligan was honest, and careful research into the past revealed no incident at all in Philip's life that would justify the suspicion that he would be unkind to any woman.

What was the meaning of it then? There seemed no answer to the question.

## CHAPTER XXV

THERE was a new little air of self-importance about Eva when she went in to dinner that night.

Philip, waiting for her in the dining-room, heard her singing as she came downstairs.

He listened with a faint sense of amazement. It was so long since she seemed at all gay.

Dinner was an informal affair at the Highway House nowadays, and Philip still wore his tweeds, but to-night Eva had changed into a semi-evening frock cut rather low at the neck.

She had done her hair differently, too, and the thought struck Philip as she came into the room that he had never seen her look prettier.

He glanced down at his own clothes in annoyance.

"If I had known that this was to be a gala night, I would have changed," he said, trying to speak lightly.

She laughed.

"Oh, it doesn't matter, only somehow I felt as if I wanted to dress myself up—" She took her seat at her husband's right hand.

She looked at Philip now with bright eyes.

"I'm so hungry. . . ." she said. "I hope you're going to eat a big dinner, because I am."

He made an effort to fall in with her mood.

"And how is London looking?" he asked.

"Beautiful! I believe I shall like living there after all. We might move in as soon as your mother comes back, don't you think? It's all ready—except your smoking-room."

"And did you choose the carpet?"

"No—I meant to—but . . ." She sounded rather surprised at herself; she had intended going on to the stores when Calligan came, but his presence had made her forget about it.

"But—what?" Philip asked.

She laughed a little self-consciously.

"Mr. Calligan came in. He thought we were settled there already. I was so surprised to see him."

"Calligan!" Philip flushed; so this was the meaning of her cheerfulness.

"Yes—" She seemed quite unconscious of any change in her husband's manner. "He took me out to tea; it was so nice, seeing him again. I told him he would have to come to the flat a great deal when we move in. . . ."

"Did you show him over it?" Philip's voice was dangerously quiet.

She shook her head.

"Oh, no! I didn't think about it. We had tea, and then he saw me off."

There was a little silence.

"He didn't say anything about coming down here I suppose?" Philip said then.

"No, he didn't, but I told him I hoped he would——" She broke off, struck by something in her husband's eyes as for a flashing moment they met hers.

He lowered them again almost immediately, but Eva had seen their passionate anger, and her heart began to race with a sudden wild hope.

Was he jealous—and of Calligan? Was he really jealous?

If so, then perhaps—perhaps he was not quite so indifferent to her, after all.

The thought took her breath away. She trembled from head to foot as she sat there.

An unworthy flirtation just as a means to an end had never occurred to her until now. She had liked Calligan simply and unaffectedly because he so obviously liked her and sought her company, but now a sudden mad hope flashed through her mind.

If she could make Philip jealous! She loved him so much that she never considered Calligan in her calculations or had a thought to spare for the tragedy such a thing might bring into his life.

Philip was her world. She adored him! the further they grew apart the more she longed for his love. And now it seemed as if she had inadvertently been shown the way in which to gain her desire.

She sat staring before her with wide, excited eyes; her lips were a little parted—she looked like an eager child who has been shown some wonderful toy and half promised its possession.

Philip, watching her, put a very different construction on the tremulous hope that suddenly flushed her face.

He had never seen her so gay and animated since their marriage, and the thought that a chance meeting with Calligan should have wrought such a change turned his blood to fire.

Later he followed her to the drawing-room; as a rule he left her to get through the evenings alone, but she took no notice.

She sat down at the piano and began playing the opening bars of a song that stood on the rack.

Philip looked at her, at her soft, white neck and

shoulders and the dainty head with its crown of pretty hair, and his eyes darkened with sudden passion.

She was his wife and he had never kissed her since they were married.

An almost brutal desire rose in his heart to master her, to let her see that he was not always going to acquiesce so tamely to her indifference.

He threw his cigarette away, and a fighting look crept into his eyes.

He crossed the room and stood behind her, and, as if she knew what he was contemplating, she stopped playing suddenly and, rising swiftly to her feet, turned and faced him.

For a moment they looked at one another silently, and a dull flush crept into the man's face.

He only saw the indifference of his wife's eyes; he could not guess how every breath seemed to choke her, and a sudden boorish instinct to rouse her, somehow, anyhow, seized him.

"I suppose if I were Calligan—" he began, and stopped, ashamed of his own words.

Eva turned away; she was afraid that he would see the little triumphant light in her eyes.

"If you were Mr. Calligan—" she echoed lightly; but he did not continue.

She stifled a little yawn—

"What a pity you are not," she said deliberately. "It would be amusing to have him here." She sat down in a big chair and dragged a cushion beneath her pretty head. She had no least idea how well she was acting; her heart and mind were in a turmoil, but the very strength of her desire drove her on. She looked up at him with a little tantalising smile.

"How bad-tempered you look," she said casually.

Her composure goaded him beyond endurance; he came and stood over her; his hands were clenched; he looked down at her with burning eyes.

"Perhaps it may amuse you to know that lately I've been cursing myself for all this business," he said hoarsely. "I've blamed myself because you—you seemed so unhappy. I'd—I'd have given my right hand sometimes if I could have seen you—as you were when I first knew you; but now—" He made a gesture of intolerance with his clenched hand. "It only shows what a fool I was to waste the time—" he rushed on violently. "To waste my regrets—we're just a pair, after all—the balance is equal—" He could not trust himself to go on; he flung out of the room, slamming the door after him.

He went out into the darkness of the garden and walked



up and down. He kept clenching and unclenching his hands impotently.

To-night he felt at the end of his tether. He hated Calligan from the depths of his soul. His jealous imagination magnified that chance meeting at the flat into enormous proportions. He believed that she had arranged it. He was sure that she must care for the man to have looked as radiant as she had done at dinner.

Philip had never wished to love any woman as much as he now loved his wife. He had always pictured himself as contented with a quiet, easy affection. He hated the suffering this new emotion entailed. For days past he had been trying to think of some means of escape from it.

The thought of the constant, close companionship with her which would be unavoidable in the new flat he could not tolerate. Down here at the Highway House one could always get out in the country and more or less escape from it all, but there in town—where the rooms were but a stone's throw apart, and with Calligan always wandering round. . . .

His agitated pacing had brought him round to the drawing-room window. The blinds were undrawn, and the light from within streamed out into the garden.

He moved closer to it and saw Eva still in the big chair where he had left her.

There was a book on her lap, but she was not reading. Her hands were clasped on the open pages, and her eyes looked out mournfully into the silent room.

Philip stood watching her with his angry heart in his eyes. It seemed impossible that he and she were really married. He thought of the days of their first friendship with a sort of home sickness.

He would have given his soul now for one of her friendly smiles—one of the shy glances with which she had always greeted him after their engagement.

And the man for whom she had really cared, the man who had been too much of an insensate clod to realise what happiness was waiting for him—who was that man?

Philip knew so few of the Dennison's friends.

Whoever it was, the man was a fool; and now there was Calligan!

Supposing Eva really cared for Calligan! The sweat broke out on his face at the mere thought. He turned away from the window and went back to his restless pacing.

What were her thoughts as she sat there alone in the silent room? Not with him, he was very sure.

She had so determinedly refused to allow him to kiss her; she had sprung up and beyond reach of him before

he had even touched her; he wished now that he had not taken the repulse calmly. Perhaps she would have had more respect for him if he had kissed her in spite of her resistance; some women liked a bullying man; some women—oh, confound all women! he had only ever taken two of them seriously in all his life, and they had both let him down—badly.

He wandered down to the gate, and folding his arms on the top bar for a moment laid his head down on them.

He was heart-sick and miserable; this trouble seemed all the harder to bear because hitherto his life had been so free of care.

He was sure to live a confoundedly long time, he thought morosely, and if this state of affairs was to continue . . .

"Phil—is it you, Phil?" said a voice from the darkness.

Young Winterdick threw up his head with a start; for a moment he did not recognise the voice. He answered confusedly:

"Yes. Who it is? Who are you?"

A little nervous laugh answered him, and Philip stood suddenly stiffly erect.

"Is it you, Miss Arlington?" he said quietly.

"Yes. Peter's gone up to the house with a message."

"He shouldn't have left you here. Why didn't you come in?"

He unlatched the gate. He could see where the girl stood now by the glint of her white frock in the darkness.

She answered him in a low voice:—

"He wanted me to, but I wouldn't . . ."

"Peter should not have left you here alone." Philip's voice sounded angry. "Come up with me. Eva will be glad to see you."

She did not move.

"I don't want to—I . . . She broke off; then suddenly she rushed on again with trembling impulsiveness. "I couldn't bear to see you two together. I hate her! I hate you—I hate you both! I thought I shouldn't mind. I thought . . . oh Phil, don't you care for me at all now?" she pleaded piteously.

There was a little silence; then Philip said quietly:—

"I would have avoided this if I could. I—I don't want to hurt you. Perhaps it's presumption on my part to imagine that anything I can say could affect you in the least, but . . . but you've forced it upon me, and so"—he drew a long breath and ran an agitated hand through his hair—"what little there ever was—between you and I—is ended and done with," he went on, more firmly. "I'm not going to say I didn't care at all—I did!—but I know now it wasn't in the right way. I know now that I never

really cared for any woman until—until I married my wife . . . .”

Her voice turned into a sort of whimper. “You can’t have changed so soon, Phil—it’s such a little while ago, and you said . . . .”

“I spoke and behaved like a fool,” he interrupted vehemently. “I am grateful to you for having made me realise it . . . and—and—anyway—I’m married—anyway, it’s too late for . . . .” He stopped sharply, as footsteps sounded on the gravel walk behind him, and the next moment Peter and Eva joined them.

Eva did not see her husband at once—it was too dark to distinguish anything but the white of Kitty’s frock.

“Why wouldn’t you come in?” she asked. “I am all alone—Philip went out some time ago . . . .”

Philip took a step forward.

“I am here,” he said rather curtly.

There was a little silence, then Eva laughed.

“I didn’t see you—it’s so dark, isn’t it?” Her voice sounded perfectly quiet and indifferent. “Peter declares he can’t stay, though I don’t know what the hurry is. Shall we walk part of the way with them, Philip?”

She gave him no time to refuse; she linked her arm in her brother’s, leaving Philip to follow with Kitty.

Peter glanced back over his shoulder rather uneasily.

“Oughtn’t we to wait for them?” he protested. The gleam of Kitty’s white frock seemed a long way off, but Eva only laughed.

“Nonsense—and I want to talk to you . . . Peter—are you really happy, quite happy?”

“Quite.” There was no mistaking his sincerity.

A little pang shot through her heart.

“I’m glad—very glad,” she said.

They walked a few steps in silence, then Peter said with a sort of nervous bluntness:

“You’ve asked me a question and I’ve answered it. Now you’ve got to answer one for me. Fair play, you know, Bonnie.”

“Well?” She tried to speak lightly, but her heart beat a little faster. She dreaded what was coming.

“I’ve wanted to ask you—often,” he said slowly. “But somehow I’ve never been able to screw up my courage. . . Bonnie—what’s really wrong between you and Philip?”

He felt his sister’s fingers tighten on his arm and heard her draw a quick breath, and he blurted out that he hoped she did not mind, that he had not wanted to interfere, but that people were talking, and he hated it, and so . . . .

“Talking! What are they saying?” she asked dully.

“Only that you’re never seen together—that Philip looks

miserable, and that you do too." He glanced down at her apologetically, but it was too dark to see her face.

"I hate to hear it, Bonnie," he went on. "I—dash it all, I'm jolly fond of you, you know that! . . . You used to tell me everything at one time. If there's anything I can do to help. . . ."

"Thank you, dear, but there isn't. It's sweet of you, Peter, but . . . ."

"You mean that you won't tell me. . . ."

"There's nothing to tell. . . ."

"I know what it is," he broke out angrily. "His people think he married beneath him—I always said that the Winterdicks were snobs, and you wouldn't believe me. If they've been snubbing you—"

She forced herself to laugh.

"Silly old bull-at-a-gate!—I'm not the sort of person to allow myself to be snubbed; Mrs. Winterdick is awfully kind; she's a little formal, but she doesn't mean anything, and Philip—"

Her voice quivered a little as she spoke her husband's name, but she went on bravely—

"You know people always say that the first year of married life is difficult—and it is, Peter! Everything's strange—and, after all, we didn't know one another very well when we were married, did we? And so . . . ."

She floundered helplessly.

"You don't believe me," she finished at last faintly.

Peter hesitated.

"You don't know how sad you look," he temporised. "Bonnie, you used to be all smiles before you were married! What did we give you your nickname for, I should like to know—but to see you now!—why even Kitty says . . . ."

"Kitty!" She drew her arm from his; so he had been discussing her with Kitty. She stood still.

"Shall we wait for the others?" she said.

"Now you're wild with me—" He tried to take her hand. "Don't be wild, Bonnie. . . ."

"I'm not; of course, I'm not. I couldn't ever be with you. . . ."

She squeezed his fingers and let them go as Philip and Kitty joined them.

"We'll leave you to go the rest of the way alone," she said, lightly. "Having chaperoned you so far . . . ."

They exchanged good-nights, and presently Eva and Philip were walking back alone.

The soft warm darkness was all about them. It was an ideal night for lovers, but Eva and her husband walked a pace apart, and neither of them knew how the other's

pulses were racing, or how much each of them longed to break down the barrier between them.

Eva stole a glance at Philip. He was walking rather fast, and with his head held high. She could see the outline of his big figure, and the red glow of the cigarette at which he was puffing with unnecessary violence.

She longed to slip a hand through his arm and try and drive the moodiness from his face; to see him once again, lighthearted and inconsequent as she had first known him, but she was afraid of repulsion or what would be worse—dutiful acceptance of her timid overture.

"There'll be a moon to-morrow, I should think," Philip said, suddenly.

"Yes—" she almost laughed at the banality.

"You'll be able to do a little more worshipping," he said, in a hard voice. "Do you remember the night I found you? . . ."

She interrupted quickly.

"Yes, I remember."

They walked a little way silently.

"It's all rot!" he broke out then, irritably. "I can't understand why women will be so ridiculous! As if wishing to the moon is any good—your wish never came true, did it?"

"No—"

"And yet, I suppose you still believe in it."

No answer.

They had reached the house now; Philip opened the door and stood aside for her to enter. He glanced at her with jealous eyes as she stepped into the light of the hall.

"You said that some day you would tell me what you were wishing that night," he said abruptly.

"Did I?" She raised her eyes for an instant and dropped them again. "Perhaps I will—some day," she submitted lightly. She turned towards the stairs. "Good-night!" she said hurriedly.

Philip suddenly caught her hand; she shrank back against the wall to get as far away from his as she could, and he imprisoned her there with an arm on either side of her.

"You thought I wanted to kiss you in the drawing-room this evening," he said rapidly. "You were right—I did. I could make you kiss me now, if I chose." He bent a little towards her.

He saw how the colour ebbed from her face, and how wide her eyes grew, and it gave him a sort of angry pleasure to know that he had some power over her, even if it were only to make her afraid of him.

Somewhere upstairs a door banged, and Philip moved quickly.

Eva saw her opportunity and seized it; she dodged under his arm and ran across the hall and up the stairs.

## CHAPTER XXVI

THE Winterdicks moved up to town at the end of September. "I shall be down every week-end," so Philip told his mother when she shed a few tears about it. "It's only natural that Eva should want her own home . . ."

"She could be absolute mistress here." Mrs. Winterdick protested. "I am quite willing to give up the reins to her, if it's only to keep you with me, Phil. You don't realise how lonely I shall be."

He did realise it quite well, and his heart ached for her.

"Perhaps if you spoke to Eva yourself," he suggested. But Mrs. Winterdick would not do that; she was a little afraid of her son's wife; the memory of her own share in this luckless marriage was a constant source of remorse to her.

She thought that Philip had aged years; it tore her heart to see the hard unhappiness of his eyes.

The evening before they were to leave the Highway House Philip wandered round the garden alone.

Now it had come to the point, he hated going. It had been a particularly fine September, and as yet there were only a few signs of autumn in the garden, only the faintest tinge of yellow and gold in the trees.

Philip was essentially a country man. He loved an outdoor life, and the thought of a flat—expensive and luxurious though it might be—stified him.

He went down to the stables where he had found his wife that night talking to the groom, and stroked the soft nose of the brown horse which she had been fondling then. He felt somehow as if he were saying good-bye to everything for ever. It was like shutting up a book which one has enjoyed reading, and which has unexpectedly ended in tragedy.

He went all over the gardens and out into the fields beyond. Every step of the way he was reminded of his father. Almost every tree and gateway had some vivid memory of the many times they had gone this way together.

He lingered out in the sunset so long that he was late for dinner. Eva and Mrs. Winterdick had already begun when he got in. It was rather a silent meal.

After the first quick glance at her husband Eva knew instinctively what he was feeling. Though he had said no word to her, she knew that he hated leaving his home, and that this last night was one of great sadness for him.

His face to-night was a constant reproach to her. She avoided looking at him as much as possible. The little pleasure which she had found in arranging and furnishing the flat faded into the background. She was conscious of a sort of home-sick feeling herself as she realised that this was their last night in the Highway House.

She had not been happy here, and yet . . . well, it was Philip's home, and she loved it for his sake.

When dinner was ended she followed Mrs. Winterdick to the drawing-room. Conversation was difficult. Eva knew that the elder woman was blaming her for taking Philip away. She rose eagerly when Mrs. Winterdick asked her to play something. She sat down at the piano, glad of an opportunity to put an end to the forced conversation.

The song she had been trying the night when Philip tried to kiss her still stood on the rack. She turned a sheet absently and looked at the words:—

Though all the skies are clouded,  
 Though all the portents lour,  
 Somewhere—to someone  
 This is the golden hour.  
 The hour that comes softly  
 To women and men,  
 Who only know thereafter  
 That they were happy—then!

The music was soft and dreamy, and seemed to be very much one with the words. She played it over with the soft pedal down, the words ringing in her head:—

The hour that comes softly  
 To women and men,  
 Who only know thereafter  
 That they were happy—then!

That hour had come to her—once! The little golden hour on the night of the dinner party, when she and Philip had driven home together.

An aching memory of the way he had caught her in his arms and kissed her rose before her vividly. She had thought that he really cared then; but since she had often wondered bitterly if it had only been a man's ordinary treatment of a girl whom he found attractive at the moment. She hated herself for remembering that there

had been a good deal of champagne drunk that night at dinner.

Mrs. Winterdick, watching her across the room with worried, motherly eyes, saw the sadness of the girl's face and the way her hands fell listlessly to her lap when she had reached the end of the song. Eva had forgotten for the moment that she was not alone. She was thinking of the night in this very room when Philip had wanted to kiss her, and wondering if she had been wrong to refuse him.

After all, surely any sort of love was better than none! She wondered what Philip was doing—how he was spending this last evening. She turned suddenly and looked at Mrs. Winterdick, remembering her presence with a start. The elder woman said gently:—

"My dear, don't worry about me—go and see what Phil is doing."

Eva did not answer. She stood twisting her wedding-ring nervously. She wondered how much this mother of Philip knew of the tragedy of their marriage. Many, many times she had longed to tell her all about it, but she was afraid.

She had never quite conquered the feeling that the Winterdicks looked down upon her, and that they still considered the obligation entirely on their side.

She turned to the door, when Mrs. Winterdick called her back.

"After to-night," she said gently, "I shall have to leave my boy's happiness to you . . ." She took the girl's hand, and Eva could feel how her own trembled.

"Perhaps we haven't been quite fair to you, my dear," she said again, with an effort. "Perhaps we haven't considered you as much as we might have done, but . . . oh, he is so well worth loving, if only you'll try to be patient with him," she added piteously.

Eva tried to answer, but no words would come.

So well worth loving! Did she need to be told that! She bent hurriedly and kissed the elder woman's sad face and went slowly away.

There was a wood fire burning in the hall, for the evenings were chilly, and she went across to it and knelt down before the cheery blaze, holding her hands to its warmth. But for the moment the tears in her eyes blurred everything.

She knew just how Philip's mother must be feeling,—just what pain had prompted her words. Her own love for Philip gave her understanding, and yet through it all rose the rebellious thought that nobody had considered her. Nobody knew or cared that her own heart was breaking.



"After to-right I shall have to leave my boy's happiness to you."

She could only suppose that everyone believed that she cared nothing for Philip, since even his mother hesitated to trust his happiness to her; and yet without him she felt that she would just cease to exist.

As she knelt there she heard Philip come down the stairs into the hall behind her.

She did not turn, but her heart began to race as he came close up to where she was kneeling.

For a moment she wondered if he would try to kiss her again—if . . . She closed her eyes giddily. His voice broke in upon her incoherent thoughts:—

"You don't know what's become of my tennis racquet, do you? I thought I'd let Peter have it. I shan't play any more this year."

She woke from her dreaming with a start and rose slowly to her feet.

Philip was not looking at her, or he would have seen how white her face was.

"I daresay it's been packed with the other things and sent up to town," she said with an effort. "I'm sorry if you wanted it . . ."

"Oh, it doesn't matter." He turned away, and she saw him cross the hall and take down his coat.

"I'm going out for half an hour," he said.

She followed him to the door—

"Would you like me to come too?" she asked stammeringly.

His hand was on the latch and he pulled it back with a jerk, letting in a rush of cold night air; then he said:

"It's pouring with rain—you can't come out; it's pelting."

It was quite true—the rain was teeming down through the darkness.

Eva drew back; she did not mind the rain, but the relief she had heard in her husband's voice decided her at once.

"Very well," she said quietly.

For an instant she wondered if he could be going to see Kitty Arlington, but she drove the thought away ashamed.

When he had gone she went up to her own room and tried to read, but the rain against the windows distracted her attention.

She put her book down and went over to the window, pulling the blind aside, but she could see nothing save the waving branches of a tree close to the window.

The time passed slowly. She heard the servants locking up downstairs, and she went out on to the landing and

told them to leave the front door unlatched; then she stole down and made up the fire in the hall. Philip would be cold and wet through when he came in, she knew.

It was nearly eleven o'clock. She felt curiously restless and excited; there was a sort of dread in her mind as she thought of to-morrow. What fresh disappointments awaited her in the new life to which she was going?

Whenever she thought of the flat she thought also of Calligan; she knew instinctively that he was to have some important influence on her life, and it made her afraid.

There was no man in the whole world for whose love she cared anything if she could not have her husband's and yet the very thought of Calligan quickened her pulses.

She paced up and down the room restlessly. Supposing Philip's jealous suspicions were correct, and Calligan did think something of her?

Philip did not want her—he had been glad that it was raining so she could not go out with him; he cared nothing for her—he never would . . .

And she wanted him so badly—his rebuff to-night had stirred the pain into agonised throbbing again.

She must have his love—must make him care; that was her one desperate thought; she felt wildly that it did not matter what means she used in order to gain her end.

Supposing she went down to him when he came in to-night? Supposing she tried to make him understand. . . she flushed hotly at the mere thought. What would she do if he rebuffed her again?

Supposing she wrote him a little note and left it on the hall table?—she knew that he always took his boots off by the fire in the hall before he came upstairs.

She pencilled a note to him with shaking fingers.

"I want to speak to you.—Eva."

That was all, but it would be enough, if he cared for her.

She stole down through the silent house, and laid the folded note on the table beside his slippers, so that he could not fail to see it, then she flew upstairs again as she heard his tread on the wet gravel path outside and his voice speaking to one of the dogs.

She left the door of her room ajar, and stood there in the darkness trembling; she felt as if she had done something of which to be ashamed; had there been time, she would have gone down and recovered the note before he came in, but already she heard his key in the front door, heard him open and shut it.

A little silence followed; she opened the door and crept across the landing, peering down over the balusters into the hall below.

Philip was there, still in his wet coat, one foot on a

chair, unlacing his boots. In another moment he would look round for his slippers. . . She stole back to her room.

She felt afraid of him now—more afraid of herself. She could not imagine what she could say to him, what excuse she could make for having written at all.

She heard him coming up the stairs two at a time, and her heart seemed almost to stop beating. But Philip passed her door and went on to his own room, and she gave a little gasp of relief, thankful for a moment or two in which to recover her composure.

But Philip did not come, though she could hear him moving about.

She waited breathlessly. A moment ago she had been afraid because she thought he was going to answer her summons, and now she was more afraid because she believed that he would not.

If he did not come she would indeed know that he cared nothing for her. Her heart seemed almost to stop beating. She stood there in the darkness, leaning against the wall for support.

Then a bar of light from his room that had streamed out across the landing was suddenly extinguished. It was followed by the shutting of his door, and then—then there seemed nothing in all the world any more but silence.

## CHAPTER XXVII

PHILIP let himself into the flat, shut the door with a little slam behind him and went on into the drawing-room.

A maid was coming out of the room as he entered, and he spoke to her casually—

“Is your mistress in? Oh, there you are . . .”

He had seen Eva standing by the fire reading a letter. He closed the door behind him and went forward.

“I’m sorry,” he said formally. “But I shan’t be able to take you to the theatre to-night after all—I forgot I had an engagement.”

She looked up from the letter she was reading.

“Oh, very well—it doesn’t matter,” and her eyes fell again.

Philip kicked the fire into a blaze.

It was a chill October day, and outside a boisterous wind was whistling up and down the streets and round the houses.

Eva and Philip had been in town a fortnight, and already to both of them it seemed an eternity.

To Eva the departure from the Highway House had been the final snapping of the thread of hope to which she had clung so desperately. Ever since that last night when Philip had ignored her note, nothing seemed to have mattered.

They had come to London, and they had been about together a great deal more than they had ever done at Apsley.

But it had all been purely for outside effect, at home the same strained relationship continued, and Eva was forced to acknowledge to herself that things were gradually getting easier to bear.

She no longer cried herself to sleep at night; no longer was so conscious of the intolerable heartache. It was there, all the same, but other things were beginning to smother it and deaden the pain. There was so much to do and see in London—and there was Calligan!

Eva made no attempt to disguise to herself what difference he made in her life. There was something about his personality that made it impossible to be dismal when he was about; there was something in his open admiration of her that increased her self-respect. Philip might think nothing of her, but at least there was somebody who did.

She was no longer even actively conscious of deliberately trying to rouse Philip's jealousy. She had begun to believe apathetically that he had never really been jealous at all—that it had only been a sort of dog-in-the-manger snarl, of which he had long since been cured.

She went on reading her letter. It was from Peter, and he suggested coming to town to stay with them for a week. Kitty was in town already, it appeared, with friends.

"Apsley seems to be the limit this autumn," so he wrote. "You've no idea how I miss you, old girl. Hope you are well and happy."

She made a little wry face over this last line. Happy! She had given up expecting to be happy.

She sighed as she folded the letter and put it away. She looked at Philip.

"Peter suggests coming to stay with us," she said.

No answer.

"Have you any objection?"

"I!" He looked up, his eyes rather hard beneath their dark brows. "The flat is yours. Ask whoever you like to stay here, of course."

"Very well." She turned away and sat down at her writing desk. "I may as well write at once, then; it will be nice to see Peter again."

"You talk as if you've been parted for years," said Philip dryly.

He watched her as she sat there, and the hardness slowly died from his face leaving it rather sad.

"I may as well give those tickets away for to-night," he said presently. "It's a pity to waste them."

Eva's rapidly flying pen stopped. She looked up. "Oh, but I can go. I've nothing else to do."

"You can't go alone."

"I can get somebody to come with me."

She was writing again rapidly now.

"Where are you going?" she asked presently.

"I promised a man at the club to dine with him."

"I see."

Everybody came before her—even some man at the club whose name he had not troubled to mention.

She finished her letter, stamped and addressed it, and rose.

"We shall both be late, then," she said lightly. "I will tell them not to wait up."

She went away to her room. She had not the smallest intention of going to the theatre without Philip, but neither had she the smallest intention of allowing him to know it. She looked at the clock—nearly six!

She had counted on this evening with Philip. She had been hardly anywhere alone with him since they left Apsley. There had always been a crowd of people, strangers for whom she cared nothing.

To-night would have been happiness of a sort to her, even if it spelled boredom to him.

She stayed in her room till she knew that Philip had left the flat. When she was sure he had gone she went across to the study where he spent most of his time when he was in.

The new carpet was down and the room looked snug and cosy. There was a fire burning and, a pair of Philip's slippers lying on the rug where he had kicked them off.

Eva sat down on the arm of a big leather chair and stared at the flames.

She wondered why she did not feel more unhappy—she could only suppose that she was getting used to it—that this was the much-talked-of "settling down" which she had always instinctively dreaded.

She liked this room—there was something very masculine about it—a great deal of Philip's personality seemed to have crept into it during the short period that he had occupied it.

A bell pinged through the silence—Eva heard the maid cross the hall, and heard a man's voice at the door.

In another moment Calligan was in the room.

He was in evening dress, and carried his hat—

"I've caught you, then! Good luck! Are you going anywhere to-night?"

She shook her head.

"We were—but Philip had an engagement, so . . ."

He broke in eagerly.

"Then you'll come with me—I wanted you both, but as Phil's out"—his voice was dry; he paused for a moment—"you'll come, won't you?"

Eva laughed.

"Where am I to come to?" she asked. "You haven't mentioned a place yet."

Calligan laughed too; he put his hat down and came forward into the firelight.

"I've got a box for the show at the S— Theatre. Boxes don't often come my way, but a man I know sent it along an hour ago. There wasn't much time, so I dressed first and chanced to luck about getting you to come—you and Philip."

The last words sounded like an after-thought.

"You are coming, aren't you?" he asked again.

Eva roused herself with an effort; she did not particularly care about going, but it seemed better than an evening spent alone.

"I shall keep you half an hour while I dress," she warned him. "And dinner—what about dinner?"

"There'll be time to get some first. . . ."

She laughed.

"We'll have dinner here," she said, decidedly. "I'll tell them."

She went away before he could argue, and Calligan slipped off his coat and sat down in Philip's chair.

He had already begun to look upon the flat as a sort of second home.

Philip had more than once told him to drop in whenever he liked, but somehow it no longer mattered to Calligan what Philip said. It was not to see him that he came, and after the first visit he had seen enough to convince himself that the Winterdicks' marriage had merely been one of convenience.

He thought it astounding good luck that Philip should be out of the way to-night; a whole evening with Eva was something for which he had never dared hope.

There was no thought of wrong in his mind with regard to his friend's wife. He loved her—but he believed that he could always be content to be her friend.

Eva took a very short time to dress; it was barely a quarter of an hour before she was back again.

"Dinner will be ready directly—nothing grand, I warn you! I hope you're not very hungry."

"I'm not very 'anything, except happy," he told her. He rose and followed her into the dining-room. "This is fine—just you and I," he said. "Do I carve?"

"If you like." She sat opposite to him—she was wearing a pearly grey frock, and the delicate colouring suited her well.

"Do you know," she said, suddenly, when they were halfway through the meal, "it seems impossible that I have only known you such a little while!"

"Yes, doesn't it?" Calligan helped himself to a second lot of salt absently. "Let me see, how long is it—a month?"

"More than six weeks—I've been married nearly six weeks."

"So it is." There was a pause, and the minds of both of them went back to that wedding day and both of them wondered a little—she that she could ever have been so happy as she had been that morning, he that she had ever married Philip. To do Calligan credit he was firmly convinced that Eva did not love her husband, otherwise perhaps he might have hesitated to so often seek her company; but he was used to knocking about with rather a Bohemian set, in which the fact of a man or woman being married was no barrier to friendship with another man or woman, and he was, without actually intending to do so, considering Eva from the same standpoint.

"Peter's coming to stay with me next week," Eva said suddenly. "You remember my brother Peter, don't you?"

"Yes—I saw him several times after you were married."

"Did you—did you hear that he is engaged?"

Calligan raised his brows.

"Really! He seems rather young! Who's the lady?"

"Kitty Arlington." Eva was watching him closely as she spoke. She had been expecting the look of blank amazement that filled his eyes. "You remember her, too, I expect," she said quietly.

"Yes—I think I do . . . rather a dollyfied-looking little thing, wasn't she? Fluffy hair and all the rest of it."

"Most men admire her," said Eva generously.

"Do they? Well, there's no accounting for tastes . . . and so sue's to marry your brother!"

"Yes . . ."

Calligan said "Humph."

Eva longed to ask what he was thinking, but she did not like to do so. She changed the subject, and they talked trivialities till they reached the theatre.

Eva was looking very pretty and animated. Calligan felt a little thrill of pride as he looked at her.

He was trying to imagine what life would be like if this

girl were his wife. He could not for the life of him understand how Philip could remain so cold and indifferent to her.

Eva stood at the front of the box for a moment, looking into the crowded house. She told Calligan excitedly that she had never been in a box before. She thought the sea of upturned faces a wonderful sight.

"I wonder if there is anyone we know here," she said. He laughed.

"I dare say—the world's a small place."

"There's not likely to be anyone I know," she said laughing. "I hardly—" She broke off: her eyes had rested on some people in the third row of stalls, and for a moment she stood quite still, her hands pressed heavily on the padded rail in front of her.

Twice she shut her eyes and opened them again, confident that she was the victim of an illusion; but, no, it was Philip—Philip, who had told her he was dining with a man at the club; Philip and . . . She felt her whole body stiffen and grow cold as her eyes fell on the girl at his side. It was Kitty Arlington.

For a moment she could not move.

Philip and Kitty—Philip and Kitty—over and over again the words went through her brain. Calligan saw that she looked rather white. He spoke to her concernedly.

"I'm all right—it's only—looking down made me feel queer for a moment . . . No, I'd rather sit here, if you don't mind."

She drew her chair a little back in the box so that Philip could not see her if he chanced to look up—she sat there during the whole of the play; she never once turned her eyes again in her husband's direction.

He had lied to her and deceived her, deliberately! And for Kitty! And Kitty was engaged to Peter!

All power of thought seemed numbed; she could not rouse herself.

"I'm afraid you haven't enjoyed it very much," Calligan said anxiously when it was over and they were making their way out with the crowd. "Does your head ache?"

"It does, rather." She caught eagerly at the excuse.

"I'm sorry, I'm afraid it's been dull for you."

"No." The monosyllable told her nothing, and she did not see his eyes.

When they reached the flap Eva hesitated.

"You won't mind if I don't ask you in to-night? she said. "I'm tired, and . . . you don't mind?"

"Of course not. When shall I see you again?"

She was silent for a moment, then she laughed bitterly.



"To-morr w—come to-morrow, if you have nothing better to do."

He held her hand.

"There isn't—everything's quite all right, isn't it?" he asked anxiously.

"Quite . . . She drew her fingers gently away. "Good night, and thank you ever so much."

Calligan waited till he had seen her safely in then he turned away. It struck him as odd that he had not noticed before how dark the night was.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

THE hall of the flat was in darkness when Eva groped her way across it to the switch, and she drew a little quick breath of relief. Philip could not be in, that was certain. She unwound the chiffon scarf with which she had covered her head and had raised her hand to the switch to extinguish the light again when the study door opened, and Philip stood there, a big, uncompromising figure, in the doorway.

For a moment Eva could think of nothing to say. She just stood helplessly staring at him.

"Are you—alone?" he asked.

"Yes." It required an effort for her to speak, an effort, too, for her to move on again towards her room.

Philip came out into the hall.

"I want to speak to you a moment."

She answered hurriedly: "I am tired. My head aches. I want to go to bed . . ."

"I shall not keep you a moment."

She knew by the sound of his voice that it would be useless to refuse. She turned back into the study with him.

Philip shut the door.

"Have you been to the theatre?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Who did you go with?" His voice was so quiet and unemotional that she was deceived.

"I went with a friend—as I told you."

"A friend!"

"Yes . . ."

There was a moment's silence; then Philip brought his fist crashing down on the table against which he stood.

"You went with Calligan," he said in passionate fury.

Her eyes met his coldly.

"You saw us?" She shrugged her shoulders. "Very well, then, there is no further need to argue. . . . Good-night." She turned to the door again.

Philip caught her by the waist and swung her round into the room.

"I'll not have you going out with Calligan, do you hear? I'll not have you going anywhere with him. . . . I've suspected this all along. I've kept quiet and said nothing in case I should be mistaken. How many times have you been out with him since we came to the flat? How many times?"

She was breathing fast, and there was an angry spot of colour on either white cheek.

"If you are trying to insult me," she began.

"Insult you!" he raved. "Insult you—when I saw you with my own eyes—I saw you coming out of the theatre with him. . . ." He broke off choking.

There was a little silence, then—

"I saw you—too," said Eva very quietly.

The hot colour rushed to his face.

"You saw me. . . . Well! and what if you did! I can explain what I was doing—it was the merest accident. . . ." The contempt in her eyes stung him. "You don't believe me," he demanded savagely.

She did not answer, but her silence was eloquent.

"It was the merest accident," Philip said again agitatedly. "I went to dine with Featherstone, I told you—I'd no more idea than the dead that he knew Kitty Arlington—it appears they're second cousins or something. She's staying in town—and he'd promised to take her to a theatre—there was a ticket to spare and he asked me to use it. He never told me his cousin's name—I'd no more idea than the dead who she was till we met her. I couldn't back out then—it would have been too absurd. . . ." He stopped.

Eva moved a little closer to the fire; she was shivering, but not with cold.

"There is no need to offer me any explanation. I have not asked you for any. I don't—want any."

"You mean that you don't believe me?" he demanded stormily.

Again no answer.

"I've told you the simple truth," he rushed on. "There's no need to make a mystery of it. Ask Featherstone if you don't believe me—or Kitty herself."

"I'm not interested."

"No you're too interested in your own concerns and Calligan to have any time to spare for me and mine," he

broke out furiously. "Do you think I'm blind! Do you think I'm a fool that I can't see! But it's got to stop. Do you think I'm going to have my wife talked about—going to have her name coupled with another man's! What do you suppose my mother would say if she knew! There's never been any scandal attached to the women of our family . . ."

She turned on him then. Her eyes were blazing, her cheeks crimson.

"Oh, I'll kill you—I'll kill you, if you say any more!" she panted. "How dare you speak to me like this! I've suffered enough at your hands already, God knows!" She was sobbing—dry, ugly sobs that shook her from head to foot. "If you think I'm proud of your name, you're mistaken. I'd give anything in the world if only I'd never seen you! I've kept my share of the bargain faithfully. I've never asked you for anything—and now, because I try to find some little happiness for myself, you insult me like this, and Mr. Calligan is your friend, too!" She struck her hands together in impotent anguish. "It's your fault I went with him to-night. You put me off for some—some man at the club I'd never even heard of. You left me here alone, and Mr. Calligan came in. I went with him—I was glad to go with him—rather than be here alone all the evening, and I'll go again—I'll go again," she said, shrilly. "I don't care what you say—you're not my master—you never will be . . ."

"Not your master!" He caught her arm, bruising her soft flesh mercilessly. He was mad now—mad with rage and jealousy and her stinging contempt—mad because he knew that she had spoken truly, and that, no matter what physical violence he used, he could never master her.

"Not your master!" he said again chokingly. "We shall see. I forbid you to go out with Calligan—forbid you, do you hear?" He shook her in his blind rage; he saw her wince under the steel pressure of his fingers, and it gave him a fierce sort of joy.

She threw back her head, and laughed at him.

"Forbid me—you!" she said cuttingly.

She had never looked more desirable to him than she did in that moment; her eyes were blazing, her cheeks crimson; one slender strap of her frock had slipped, showing her firm, white shoulder, and in the midst of his passionate rage it suddenly came over him with desolating force that he could never have her—that she cared nothing for him, that she would go on laughing at him, defying him—caring nothing for his love, and for a moment he went mad—the events of the evening had turned his blood to fire, nobody would ever know what he had

suffered since he saw his wife with Calligan, laughing and looking happier than she had ever done since their marriage—and goaded by her mocking eyes and defiant words, he raised his hand and struck her across the face. . . .

The shock of it sobered them both, and for a moment there was a terrible silence in the firelit room.

Philip had released his wife and had fallen back against the table, panting and ghastly.

"See what you've made of me," he said at last hoarsely. "You drove me to do it . . . you drove me mad. . . . Eva—oh, for God's sake. . . ." He dropped into a chair and hid his face in his shaking hands.

He was horrified at what he had done; horrified to think he could so far have forgotten himself as to strike a woman, and that woman his own wife.

He had always prided himself on his chivalry; he was afraid of the storm of passion that had swept away his self-control.

Eva was standing like a statue; the red mark made by his hand stood out accusingly against the marble white of her face; presently she moved in a queer, jerky way, almost as if she were walking in her sleep. She did not look at Philip; she reached the door and put her fingers on the handle; then she spoke in an odd, choked voice of finality:

"This—this—finishes—it . . ." And then again: "This—this—finishes—it . . ."

She waited a moment, not in the least because she expected him to answer her, but because she could not believe that she would not wake up and find that this horror was only a nightmare creation of sleep; then she dragged the door open and walked across the dark hall to her own room. . . .

She shut the door, but she did not lock it; she turned on every light and walked over to the looking-glass.

She stared at her reflection with dazed eyes—the pretty evening gown had been torn by Philip's ruthless hand, there was a bruise on her bare arm, and the red, angry mark of his hand on her face; her hair was a little dishevelled, and she mechanically raised a hand to straighten it.

For the moment she was only conscious of a dull sort of misery. Philip had struck her—he hated her so much that now he was not merely content with neglect and indifference—he had struck her.

For the first time in her life there was no softening in her heart towards him; for the first time in her life she did not try to make any excuses for him; it was irrevoc-

cable now, and final. Her own words, "This—finishes—it," summed up the only emotion in her heart.

She would stay with him no longer; she would put an end to this marriage that had been no marriage at all.

She had adored Philip with all the strength and energy of her being, but now she remembered nothing save what she had endured at his hands.

She found herself speaking aloud in the silence.

"If I stay I shall only suffer misery and shame and jealousy; if I go I shall suffer too, but at least I shall keep my self-respect."

It sounded almost as if she were arguing with someone as she stood there, a tragic figure in the brilliantly-lit room.

She thought of her wedding day and the moment when she had trampled her dress underfoot; she should have gone then, she told herself wildly—she ought never to have set out on this impossible journey.

She walked away from the glass and sat down on the couch at the foot of the bed, clutching its sides with both hands as if to keep herself from falling.

The clock out in the hall struck one, and then half-past, but she did not move. She was chilled through and aching in every limb, but she was not conscious of it.

Presently she closed her eyes giddily; there was a throbbing pulse in her head that seemed to be driving her mad; she opened them again with a little moan of pain to find Philip standing beside her.

He was as white as a ghost, with contracted brows and miserable eyes.

"Forgive me"—afterwards she remembered how strange his voice had sounded, like a voice she had never heard before.

He took up her cloak from the bed and put it round her shoulders.

"You'll take your death of cold—you're cold as ice," he said again hoarsely. He touched her hand, but she drew it away from him shivering.

"Forgive me," he said again. "I was mad—forgive me, for God's sake. . . ."

"No."

She supposed she must have spoken the word herself; she knew that it was her intention to speak it, but the voice was not hers.

She kept her eyes averted from him; it was not that she feared she might soften if she looked at him—it was simply that she was indifferent. She was worn out; she was only conscious of a great desire to be alone.

Philip paced the length of the room and back; he was trying desperately to control himself.

"You must forgive me," he said at last. "Don't you see that I can't stand it any longer. . . . I'll ask your pardon on my knees—I'll do anything you want. . . ." His voice was laboured and exhausted.

"No," she said again.

Something like a sob escaped him.

"I've been a swine, I know—I've no defence to offer, but I beg of you—Eva. . . ."

"No. . . ."

From where she sat she could see both their reflections in the long glass; she found herself staring at Philip fixedly, and yet she was not conscious of having focussed her attention on him at all.

This man was her husband, and she loved him—she felt that there was a voice at her ear reminding her of this, prompting her. She was sure that she tried to listen and to realise the truth of what the voice was saying, but it was too difficult; she could not keep her attention fixed; her lips parted in a long sigh. . . .

"No," she said again.

She did not know why she said it; it was no answer now to any words of his.

He broke out again, desperately—

"You're my wife. . . . we took one another for better or worse. . . ."

She raised her eyes, dark with bewildered suffering.

"We didn't—I took you because you were a Winterdick, and you took me because my father was a rich man—" she began to laugh, empty, foolish laughter.

"Oh—my dear!" said young Winterdick, brokenheartedly.

The little caressing words for the first time pierced her apathy; her eyes flashed into a sort of awakening, like the eyes of a sleep-walker who has been roughly aroused; her brows contracted with physical pain.

"Oh, go away—go away. . . ."

"Eva. . . ." Philip held out his arms to her, but she would not look at him. "Please go away," she said weakly.

And the next moment she was alone in the brilliantly-lit room, staring at her white face in the glass.

## CHAPTER XXIX

PHILIP did not go to bed at all that night. He sat at the window of his room looking out into the silent street and watching for the coming of the dawn.

There was a dread in his heart that if he were to go to bed he would wake and find that his wife had left him. His head was splitting. The passionate impulse which had driven him to strike Eva seemed to him the most terrible action of his whole life.

"I must have been mad," he thought over and over again.

If she had been a woman whom he hated it would still have seemed terrible, but he adored her, and he believed that she would never forgive him.

He could only remember her as he had left her, sitting in her torn frock on the couch at the foot of the bed, her eyes staring fixedly before her. He tried to conjure some happier picture of her, but failed. He could no longer even see her as she had been before their marriage—a light-hearted, happy girl. He could only see the white-faced tragic woman into which marriage had turned her.

He wondered if the fault had been all his. Until the last few months he had not known himself for a passionate man, but now he was afraid of the depths of feeling of which he was capable.

He kept the door of his room wide open all night. It was right opposite to Eva's across the hall. He knew it would be impossible for her to come out without his knowing it.

She was so silent that a fresh fear struck him. He left his chair and crossed the room softly to hers.

There was no sound within, but the door was still unfastened and all the lights were burning as they had been when he left her.

After a moment he pushed the door wider and went in.

Eva had slipped sideways on the couch and lay, dressed as she was, her head pillowed on her bare arms.

He bent over her fearfully; but she was asleep—only a troubled sleep, it is true, in which her face still looked drawn and unhappy—but Philip caught his breath in sharp relief.

He took the eiderdown from the bed and laid it gently over her. He would have liked to move her into a more comfortable position, but was afraid of waking her.

She looked so young, such a girl, in spite of the trouble in her sleeping face, and a great tenderness stirred in his heart. He bent nearer to her and she stirred and gave a little protesting murmur, as if even in her sleep she was conscious of his presence and found it distasteful.

Philip went back to his own room and sat down by the window again. Grey dawn-light filled the street now. He opened the window and let the cold morning air fan his aching head. A brown, dusty-looking sparrow which had

risen early to look for breakfast called a friend'ly "Cheep" as it flew by.

Philip thought of the Highway House and wondered how the garden was looking. He had seen it so often just as early in the morning as this—the dew-laden grass and the tall, stately trees slowly appearing through the grey mist. It seemed a lifetime since he left it all. Oh, to be back there again and find all this only a bad dream! He crossed his arms on the chair-back and leaned his head despondently on them.

Eva meant to leave him, he was sure of it. He had instinctively guessed the meaning of those last words to him in the library:—

"This—finishes it!"

He wondered what his mother would say. He was sorry for his mother.

She would hate the scandal and exposure.

He must have dozed off, because he woke with a start to the sound of the maids moving about the flat.

He started up with wildly-beating heart. Eva! Supposing she had gone while he slept; he went again to her room, but the door was shut now and locked.

He went along to the bathroom and washed and shaved and changed his dress suit for tweeds.

He dreaded meeting his wife; he was even more ashamed now in the light of day of what he had done than he had been overnight.

He breakfasted alone. The maid told him that Mrs. Winterdick was staying in her room. Philip thought she looked at him with unfriendly eyes; she was a girl whom Eva had brought with them from Apsley.

He hardly touched his breakfast; he took the paper and went to the library, leaving the door wide open so that nobody could leave the flat without his knowledge.

Half the morning had gone before Eva came out of her room; she was dressed for walking.

Philip was on his feet instantly.

"Where are you going!"

She did not answer, and he rushed on:—

"I want to speak to you—I must speak to you."

"There is nothing to be said." She took a step forward towards the door, but he barred the way.

"If you will not wait, I shall have to make you," he said.

She turned back to the library at once.

"There is no need for the servants to hear our vulgar quarrelling," she said, bitterly.

Philip followed her into the room. He shut the door



and stood with hands deep thrust into his pockets, staring at the floor with hopeless eyes.

"What do you want to say to me?" she asked. "Please be quick. . . ."

She stood with her face averted. She was ashamed that he could see the mark he had left on her cheek; but it seemed to her that the greater shame was hers in having to bear it at all.

Philip had forgotten every word he meant to say. He blurted out desperately:—

"I suppose you mean to leave me. . . I suppose that is what you meant last night when you said that everything was finished. I don't blame you—I deserve it all, and more besides—but there's my mother to think of—I'm not asking anything for myself—but there's my mother—she's had enough trouble lately—it will break her heart if we—if I—if you . . ."

She faced him then.

"What will break her heart?" she asked, coolly. "To know that you struck me or to know that I am leaving you?"

He coloured to the roots of his hair.

"But you're not leaving me," he broke in, agitatedly. "You'll give me another chance—think of the scandal there will be—we've only been married six weeks. . . ."

"And there has never been any scandal attached to the women of your family—yet!" she finished for him. "Is that what you are thinking?—you see I have not forgotten what you told me last night. . . ."

"Last night I was mad—I did not know what I was saying."

She laughed ever so little.

"Oh, no; I think you were sane enough," she said, quietly. "I think you knew very well what you were saying—and doing. . . ." She drew a long breath. "I know, of course, that you never cared for me, but I thought at least that you respected and trusted me—I know now that you do neither. . . ."

"It's not fair to remember last night against me. I behaved like a cad and a brute—but you drove me to it—you know I loathe Calligan being with you—you know. . ."

Her eyes flashed.

"I know that you insulted me—that you accused me of an abominable thing for which there was not the least foundation. I like Mr. Calligan as I should like anyone who let me see he liked my society, and that I did not bore him, and—and . . ." She controlled her voice with an effort. "All this is so useless. I have made up my mind—I cannot stay with you. . . . If this had not come

now, it would have done later, and I would rather go before I have any—worse memories—to take with me.”

It was quite unconsciously that she touched the mark on her face, but Philip saw it and turned scarlet.

“I’d give my soul to undo what happened last night—you must believe that,” he said in deep agitation. “I’ve—I’ve never been a brute to a woman in all my life before—I—I’d cut off my right hand if it could do any good. . . . If you’ll only give me a chance to make up for it—to show you that I’m not really such a brute, I—”

He stopped—someone had knocked at the door.

It was Eva who answered “Come in.”

Philip turned away and took up a paper; he did not know that he held it upside down, or that his agitation would have been unmistakable even to the most disinterested observer.

“Mr. Calligan, if you please,” said the maid.

Calligan came into the room all smiles and cheeriness.

“Hullo you old bouncer!” He thumped Philip on the back. “Good morning, Mrs. Winterdick! I hope I’m not a nuisance, but the fact is I’ve got to go out of town for a couple of days, and I thought I’d just run in to tell you, in case you should wonder why I didn’t butt in as usual—”

“Out of town!” Eva echoed his words with quick disappointment.

“Yes—only for a day or two. I thought Phil—” But Philip had gone. He felt it an impossibility to be civil to his friend, he was afraid to trust himself.

Calligan looked at Eva with a comical expression in his eyes.

“I’m afraid your worthy husband got out of bed the wrong side this morning,” he began lightly, then broke off, moving a step towards her.

“Why, what have you done to your face?” he asked blankly.

Eva raised her eyes. She was crimson from brow to chin. She tried to laugh, tried to find some evasive answer, but his obvious distress broke through the bitterness she had built round her heart and, covering her bruised face with her hands, she burst into tears.

Calligan stood like a man turned to stone. He looked somehow old and pinched.

Presently, he roused himself with an effort and walked away from her. He leaned an elbow on the mantelshelf and stared down into the grate, which was still filled with last night’s ashes.

He guessed instinctively what had happened, but for the moment the shock of the knowledge seemed to turn

him to stone, robbing him of power of speech or even thought.

That they were not happy together he had always known, but that Philip would ever descend to brutality he would never have believed.

He longed to go to her and take her in his arms and say how much he wanted to make her happy, to dry her tears, and bring the sunshine back to her eyes again, but he knew that he must not.

Even if she cared ever so little for him, Philip was his friend, and so . . . he pulled himself together with an effort.

"I'm sorry I've been so silly," Eva said, trying to laugh. "You must think that I'm always crying—" She dried her tears determinedly. "And I'm not, really—I'm quite a cheerful sort of person—really."

Calligan managed a laugh somehow.

"You don't need to tell me that," he said with forced cheerfulness. "And we all get the blues sometimes. Are you going out, and, if so, may I come with you, or is Philip . . ."

He stopped uncertainly.

It seemed a long time to him before Eva answered, though in reality it was but a few seconds.

"I'm going home—to Apsley," she said slowly. "You may come and see me off if you like."

Something in her voice struck him apprehensively; he turned round and looked at her across the room.

She laughed, meeting his eyes.

"You're thinking that I've soon got tired of the flat," she said rather shrilly. "So I have—I hate it—I . . ." Her excitement died down as quickly as it had arisen; she sat silent, twisting her handkerchief schoolgirl fashion.

Calligan was pale to the lips, but he managed to smile unconcernedly.

"It's rather a long journey just for a day, isn't it?" he said casually. "It's going to be wet, too. . . . I shouldn't go to-day if I were you. Wait till I come to town and we'll get Philip to run us both down in the car. . . ."

"Philip!"

"Yes." He steeled his heart to the bitterness with which she echoed her husband's name. He went on hardly knowing what he said.

"Yes. We'll make a day of it. Phil and I used to think nothing of running down there to tea and back. I've never told you what good times we used to have. I must some day. He's one of the best, you know. Takes a bit of understanding, of course—we all do—but I've

never known him do a mean or a shabby thing—never!”

He stopped. It had been on the tip of his tongue to add “until now,” but he checked the words in time.

“And that’s more than I can say of any other man I know,” he went on.

She knew why he was saying all this; knew that he understood as well as if she had told him the cause of her tears.

“Mrs. Winterdick was always awfully good to me, too,” he went on. “She’s aged shockingly since the old man died. . . She adores Philip, of course; he’s all she’s got . . .”

He stopped. He wondered if Eva would ever guess what it had cost him to defend her husband; if she would think that he was blaming her even in the very slightest for what had happened. But he was a man of the world, and he knew that if Eva left the flat to-day in her present mood she was taking the first step towards irretrievable disaster.

He took up a book from the table, looked at it and put it down aimlessly.

“So I shouldn’t go to Apsley to-day,” he said, presently. “Eh?—what do you think?”

Their eyes met across the room, and for a long moment there was a poignant silence; then Eva impulsively held out her hand.

Calligan took it and held it hard before he let it go.

“Bless you!” he said rather huskily. He turned to the window to hide a sudden mistiness in his eyes. “You see, I was right, and it’s raining cats and dogs,” he said, lightly.

“You get them to make up a fire, and stay indoors—eh?”

“Yes.” Her moment of madness had died, leaving her inert and coldly indifferent. When Calligan had gone, she went to find her husband. He was sitting on the arm of a chair in the dining-room, an unlit cigarette between his lips, staring at the floor.

He looked up with a gleam of hope in his miserable eyes when she entered; he rose to his feet.

She spoke without looking at him.

“I am not going to Apsley to-day,” she said clearly. “I have changed my mind.” Philip gave a little inarticulate sound, and she went on quickly: “I don’t want you to misunderstand me. If stay with you it will be, for your mother’s sake, that is all—and for no other reason.”

Then she went away and left him.

## CHAPTER XXX.

PETER DENNISON came to town four days after he received Eva's letter. He had had a dull week in Apsley without Kitty; it never occurred to him, poor fellow, that she had gone to London to escape him; that she was tired of his boyish adoration and devotion.

He believed her when she wrote and said that she missed him, but he did faintly wonder why, if it were so, she could not have got an invitation to her cousins for him also.

However, he was quite contented to go to Eva's; he had a very real affection for his sister, and he liked Philip.

"I haven't told Kitty that I'm coming up, you know," he said with a little grin, as he greeted his sister. "I thought I'd give her a surprise . . . You haven't seen anything of her, I suppose."

"No—Philip saw her once at a theatre though."

"With her cousins, of course?" he asked.

"Yes, with her cousins."

Peter squared his shoulders a little and looked around him.

"You've got a tip-top show here," he said with something of his father's complacency. "And, of course, there's still the Highway House—you'll go down there a lot, eh?"

"Yes, I suppose so. Philip wants to go down for the hunting next month." She put her hand through his arm and squeezed it. "Dear old boy—it is lovely to see you again."

He held her off and looked at her with laughing criticism.

"If you weren't too old I should say that you'd grown," he said, with a note of perplexity in his voice. "Or have you got thin?"

She made a little grimace.

"I've got thin—London doesn't suit me, I expect. But I'm not a bit different, really, Peter—" she added, wistfully.

"You look more grown-up," he insisted. "More—more like the lady-of-the-house sort of style, Bonnie. I can't imagine you climbing plum trees now, and scrambling over five-barred gates like you used to."

"Silly boy!" There were tears in her eyes. "As if a few weeks could make all that difference! You wait till we come to Apsley again, and I'll climb trees and gates

with the best of you. . . . We won't wait tea for Philip."

"Where is he?"

She shrugged her shoulders a little.

"He went out somewhere. . . . Mr. Calligan said he might drop in though—you remember Mr. Calligan, Peter?"

"Rather! Now I always liked Calligan! He's the sort of man you feel at home with directly."

"He's a dear," said Eva, warmly. "He's been awfully kind to me."

Peter whistled. He looked at her in pretended dismay.

"I say, that sounds bad! What does Philip say?"

"I've never asked him. . . . Sugar?"

"Two." He watched interestedly while she poured the tea. He had seen her do it scores of times before down at Apsley, or in their suburban house, but there was something different about her to-day, something which he could not explain even to himself.

"I suppose it's being married," he thought, and gave up pondering.

Calligan came in just as they had finished. He seemed pleased to see Peter.

"And how do you think your sister is looking?" he asked presently.

Peter hesitated.

"I've just been telling her that she's got thin," he said.

Eva laughed.

"What nonsense! Do let us talk of something else."

She wished Philip would come in; she was afraid that Peter would wonder at his absence.

Life had been a strange thing lately. Philip kept out of her way save when appearances demanded his presence. She did not know how he spent his time, and never asked, and neither of them had ever again referred to what had happened.

But neither of them had forgotten it. It was a nightmare memory to Philip. Though the bruise had faded from his wife's cheek, whenever he looked at her he seemed to see it still.

He had never asked what had made her change her mind about leaving him, but in his heart he knew it must have been Calligan's influence.

Though outwardly the two men were the same to one another, the old friendship no longer really existed. A thousand times it was on Philip's lips to forbid Calligan the house, but something always prevented him.

He knew that Eva's tolerance towards himself was worn to a thread, and he had long since given up all hope of a reconciliation with her.

His vision was too distorted by jealousy to recognise that Calligan was still the best friend he had—that it was Calligan, time and again, who had stepped into the breach and averted utter disaster.

But Eva knew how much she had for which to thank this man; knew that it was only the knowledge of his presence and faithful friendship that saved her from despair.

There was no man in the world for her but Philip, or ever would be.

"And what's the programme for to-night?" Calligan asked presently. "Are we going to be gay and giddy, or stay at home?" He looked apologetically at Peter. "You see, I consider myself one of the family," he said laughing. Peter nodded. He was thinking it rather odd that Calligan should so evidently have the run of the house, but he supposed it was all right—he knew that Philip and Calligan had been almost inseparable.

"I should like to go round and see Kitty," he said flushing a little. "She doesn't know I'm up." He looked at Eva. "May I bring her to dinner?"

"Of course, you may—we don't have dinner till half-past seven—run along now and ask her."

Peter arose with alacrity; he was on thorns to see his beloved again; he was secretly hugging himself at the thought of her delight at seeing him.

Eva saw him off and went back to Calligan.

"What it is to be in love!" she said lightly. "I don't think we shall see a great deal of Peter. . . . Yes, what is it!" A maid had come to the door.

"If you please, ma'am, the master telephoned when you were out this afternoon to say that he would not be in to dinner to-night, and would you please not wait."

There was a little silence; Calligan had been sitting on the piano stool, and he whirled round suddenly averting his face.

"Very well," said Eva.

Calligan was picking out the air of a comic song on the piano with one finger; he tock as long about it as possible.

Eva threw herself down into a chair.

"I wish I knew how to smoke," she said irrelevantly. "It looks so—so comforting somehow!" She held out her hand. "Give me a cigarette, Mr. Calligan!"

Calligan rose obediently.

"It'll make you sick," he said reluctantly. "It'll make your head ache—I shouldn't if I were you."

She looked up at him for a moment.

"If you were me, it's exactly what you would do," she said. "Please."

He handed her his case and struck a match.

"I wonder Peter and the other boys didn't teach you to smoke ages ago," he said.

She raised her brows.

"I think they did offer to, but I refused. Oh!" She had choked over the first puff.

Calligan laughed.

"Give it to me and let me finish it for you," he said.

"You don't like it . . ." He held out his hand.

"No!" She held the cigarette beyond his reach laughingly, and Calligan stooped forward catching her wrist.

"I object to women who smoke," he said, with mock severity. "I—"

He broke off abruptly, as Philip walked into the room. Eva was the only one of the three who did not look concerned; she raised herself a little in the chair.

"Manders told me you would not be in to dinner," she said.

"Neither shall I. I've only come back to change. How do, Tom?"

"I'm teaching your wife to smoke," Calligan said.

Philip laughed carelessly, but his eyes were unsmiling.

"I just remembered about Peter coming," he said.

"Where is he?"

"He's gone out to find Kitty. He's bringing her here to dinner."

"I see. You don't mind my not being in?"

"Of course not."

He went away, closing the door behind him.

Calligan stooped and, taking the cigarette from Eva's listless hand, threw it into the fire. She raised no objection now; her face seemed to have grown tired and dispirited.

What was to be gained by this eternal pretence and effort at keeping up appearances? she was asking herself miserably.

Wherever she was and whatever she was doing her heart and her thoughts were with Philip.

"I don't think I care about going out to-night," she said suddenly.

"Very well—come along and try those songs I sent round last night. You're neglecting your music shamefully—"

"I never had any to neglect—I can't really play—I only just strum to amuse myself sometimes—"

"Very well, then strum now to amuse me." He put the stool in readiness for her and began to sort out some music.



Eva rose reluctantly; she had no heart for music, but it would be something to do.

"We'll have this first," Calligan said. "It's a favourite of mine—I didn't know you had it. . . I think they're such fine words."

Eva looked at it—it was the song she had played to Mrs. Winterdick that last night down at the Highway House.

"Though all the skies are clouded,  
Though all the portents lour,  
Somewhere—to someone—  
This is the golden hour.

The hour that comes softly  
To women and men,  
Who only know thereafter  
That they were happy—then!"

Calligan read the words aloud.

"Fine, aren't they?" he said. "Please play it——"

But she shook her head—

"Not that—I—I don't care for it much."

"Right oh!" He took it away at once. He felt that he had unconsciously stumbled on some memory. He went down on his knees and began turning over the pile of music on the floor.

Eva sat watching him, her hands idle in her lap.

There was a step in the hall and she lifted her head eagerly.

"That must be Peter—back again."

She got up to go to the door, when it opened and her brother walked in.

He looked a little pale, she thought; he seemed to avoid her eyes.

"Where's Kitty?" she asked blankly.

"She wasn't in—she's gone to a show with her cousin. I suppose I ought to have wired that I was coming. It's not her fault, of course."

"Of course not! Did you leave a message? Then we need not wait dinner; I'm ever so hungry."

She went out to speak to one of the maids, and Peter followed. There was something rather pathetic about his eyes; he caught her arm when he was sure Calligan could not see.

"Eva—you don't think—I mean—who was Kitty with the night Philip saw her?"

She answered at once.

"With her cousin, Philip said—I think the name was Featherstone." Her eyes searched his face. "Philip was with them all the time, Peter," she added gently.

"Yes, of course. . . ." He passed an agitated hand across his mouth. "It's rather disappointing though—I'd been counting on to-night."

Eva laughed.

"You can't blame Kitty, can you, Peter—she's no idea you were in town, now, has she?"

"No, but . . . I think I'll go round again later on, if you don't mind—she may get in early."

"Very well." She knew what his thoughts were, and she wondered how many more lives Kitty was going to ruin.

Peter was such a boy.

She did her best to cheer him during dinner, and Calligan nobly seconded her efforts, but they could both see that Peter was on thorns the whole time. He glanced continually at the clock. Long before ten he said that he thought he would be off.

"But the theatres are not over for another hour," Eva said, gently. "You must give her time, Peter."

But Peter would not be persuaded. He insisted that he must go.

"I'll come part of the way with you, then," Calligan said. "If you have no objection."

"Of course not, come along."

"I shall wait up for you Peter," Eva told her brother. "And you need not mind being late if she wants you to stay. We're not at all early birds here, I can tell you."

She went into the deserted drawing-room when they had gone and sat down on the rug by the fire. The music was still strewn over the floor where Calligan had left it. The song she had refused to play was uppermost. Its words floated into her mind mournfully:—

"The hour that comes softly  
To women and men,  
Who only know thereafter  
That they were Lappy—then!"

She leaned her chin in the palm of her hand and looked into the glowing heart of the fire.

Something in the leaping flames and the silence made her think of that last night at the Highway House when she had left the note for Philip. That night had seemed like the first decided step leading on to the final tragedy. Even now she winced as she thought of that moment when she had waited for him and waited in vain.

It had been humiliation upon humiliation until that last terrible night . . . and since! Well, he had not bothered sufficiently about her since to be anything but indifferently courteous.

The outer door of the flat banged, and she started up. Peter already! Then he could not have seen Kitty! But the man taking off his coat in the hall was Philip. His wife looked at him, and her heart began to race in the old, traitorous fashion.

"I thought you were Peter," she faltered.

He smiled rather grimly.

"I did not flatter myself that you were waiting up for me," he said.

### CHAPTER XXXI

PHILIP followed his wife into the drawing-room; he looked round it quickly.

"Calligan gone?" he asked.

"Yes—he went some time ago with Peter."

"Peter!"

"Yes—Kitty was out when he called before dinner, so he has gone again."

There was a little silence; Eva stooped and began picking up the music which strewed the floor.

She had not been alone with Philip since the night she went to the theatre with Calligan, and she felt painfully nervous.

She wondered why he had come home so early; as a rule it was long past midnight when she heard him let himself into the flat.

Philip stood with his shoulders against the mantelshelf staring up at the ceiling.

"I've been with Faulkner to-night," he said.

"Faulkner!" Eva echoed the name vaguely.

"Yes." Philip brought his eyes down to her face.

"Perhaps you don't remember him—he came to Apsley for—for the wedding; big man with grey hair. . . ."

"Oh yes." She did not remember him in the least, and it did not seem to matter, but she rose to her feet; somehow she felt that something that did matter was to follow.

"He has a lot of property abroad," Philip went on, "in Rhodesia—chiefly . . . he wants a man to go out and look after it for him." Eva put out a hand and steadied herself against the piano; she knew now what was coming.

"You mean that he has asked you to go," she said with stiff lips.

"Yes."

"And you—are going

He frowned.

"I haven't decided. It takes consideration, of course. If you would rather that I refused. . . ."

"You must do as you please. I should not care to influence you."

There was a chair close to where she stood, and she sat down with an overwhelming feeling of weakness.

The firelit room and Philip seemed a long, long way off; but she could hear his voice with painful distinctness. It seemed almost as if he were shouting at her.

"It amounts to this," he was saying in a hard voice. "I can't spend the rest of my life hanging round town doing nothing. I've had enough of it already. I'm getting stale and flabby. There's nothing to keep me in England, except . . . except the mater, and she'll agree to my going if I—if I explain things to her. Faulkner has made me a generous offer—possibly because he doesn't know my incapacities. He doesn't want me for another six weeks or two months, so I can get some hunting in . . ." He turned his head suddenly and looked down at her. "Well?"

She raised her eyes.

"There seems nothing left for me to say."

Her voice was so quiet that it would have taken a more shrewd man than Philip Winterdick to have guessed what she was really feeling; to know that her heart was one wounded, unanswered question:—

"And what about me—what about me?"

"It's not as if you were dependent on me," Philip went on grimly. "You've got this place—and you can always go to the Highway House if you care to—mother would be glad to have you."

"Yes." The little monosyllable sounded to him like an indifferent acquiescence, and a wave of uncontrollable bitterness swept through his heart.

"You've no objection," he asked presently.

She laughed faintly.

"I've no right to object—we've agreed to go our own way—you must do as you please."

"Very tactfully put," he submitted dryly; then, with a sudden burst of passion: "Why can't you speak the truth and say you'll be damned glad to be rid of me?"

There was an excited flush in his face; he controlled himself with an effort.

"I beg your pardon," he said, after a moment. "I seem to have no manner, no common decency at all in these days . . ." He drew a long breath, "Are you going to wait up for Peter?" he asked with a sudden change of tone.

"Yes."

"Do you mind if I don't? I'm tired . . ." he snatched at any excuse which would take him away; he dreaded another scene, but he felt that if he stayed he would say or do something which he would repent for the rest of his life.

"No—please go."

Eva listened to his step in the hall desolately. How much more did he think she could bear, she wondered. She grasped the sides of the chair with both hands and rocked herself to and fro.

He was going away—he was going to Rhodesia and she would be left behind.

She might as well have refused to listen to Calligan. She might as well have carried out her intention and snapped the farcical tie of her marriage that bitter morning.

There would be an added humiliation now to bear. People would say that Philip had left her, that he had either never cared for her or that he had soon grown tired.

She did not know how long she sat there by the dying fire; did not know that the minutes had crawled away into hours, or that it was nearly one o'clock when Peter came in. She had given him a latchkey, and he was in the hall before she could go to meet him.

She tried to chase the shadows from her eyes—tried to smile as she went towards him, but the smile was frozen stiffly on her lips when she saw his face.

"Peter," she said with a catch in her voice.

He did not seem to hear. He hung up his hat and coat and stood for a moment aimlessly in the hall, as if he had forgotten where he was.

"Peter," said Eva again. She went over and touched his arm. "Peter—is anything the matter?"

He roused himself with a start.

"No, oh no. . . . Have you waited up? You must be dead tired."

He went back with her to the drawing-room. He stooped over the fire and held his hands to its dying warmth.

Eva watched him apprehensively. She saw how pale he was, and heard the strain in his voice. She tried to speak naturally:

"And Kitty! I hope Kitty is well!"

He did not answer for a moment; then he said hoarsely: "I only saw her for a moment. She didn't come in till past twelve. I waited up and down the street for her—I couldn't come home till I'd seen her."

"And wasn't she surprised to see you? What did she say, Peter?"

He laughed grimly.

"She certainly seemed surprised. She said"—his voice broke, but he controlled it fiercely—"she said, 'How dare you follow me and spy on me like t'his?' " He caught his sister's hand in a hard grip. "I've got to tell someone—I've got to tell you," he said, almost hysterically, "But you won't ever let anyone else know, will you, Bonnie? Promise me—promise."

"Peter, of course, not—but—"

"She wasn't glad to see me; she was angry," he went on despairingly. "She said I had no right to come. She said that she supposed I was just spying on her to see what she was doing. And that fellow stood there—that brute Featherstone, or whatever his name is, and laughed. I could have killed him," he added, between clenched teeth.

He pushed her from him suddenly and began pacing up and down the room.

"I'll wring his neck for him to-morrow," he said in boyish high-pitched excitement. "Just because he's likely to have a title some day—that's the only pull he's got over me. She told me about him before, that's why I hated her coming." His excitement suddenly died down; he flung himself on to the couch and hid his face.

"Nothing will ever be the same again—nothing," he said hoarsely.

Eva knelt beside him; she tried to laugh and chase his fears away. She told him that he was too jealous; that, of course, Kitty resented it if he had let her see that he was jealous; that it would be all right in the morning; that to-morrow he would be laughing at himself.

"Everything will be all right—you see if it isn't," she said.

She persuaded him to go to bed at last: she promised that she would go with him in the morning to see Kitty.

"We'll bring her back to lunch with us," she said cheerily. "Don't be such a goose, Peter—"

She kissed him and laughed at him, and sent him off to his room looking a little shame-faced.

This new trouble, coming on top of her own, seemed almost more than she could bear; she would have given her soul for someone in whom to confide, but there was nobody to whom she could turn . . . except Calligan! The exception slipped unconsciously into her mind, presently, when Philip had gone to Rhodesia, he would be her only friend.

She lay awake far into the night thinking of him with grateful affection; it never occurred to her that the friendship on which she counted so much was no friendship to

Calligan; that she was the one woman in his world, even as Philip was the one man in hers.

She sat up with her hands clasped round her knees, staring before her with mournful eyes.

This new dread that Philip might be going to leave her stimulated her blood.

"He shall not go—he shall not," she said aloud.

She would find some way in which to keep him. She must!

She thought of that last night at the Highway House when he had tried to kiss her, and for the hundredth time she blamed herself for having repulsed him; sometimes she believed that he had left her note unanswered as a sort of punishment.

Ought she to have known better, she wondered? Ought she to have grasped at the small overture of affection and accepted it gratefully, asking no questions, even though perhaps it had only meant a passing interest and attraction?

It seemed now, in the new, dread light shed by the mere thought of Philip's going to Rhodesia that any sort of love from him would have been better than none at all.

## CHAPTER XXXII

EVA kept her promise and went with Peter next morning to see Kitty Arlington.

She was staying in an imposing-looking house, and Eva made a little wry grimace at her brother as they waited for admittance.

"It all seems very grand and blue-blooded," she said, half-laughing.

She felt very sorry for Peter; he looked more of a boy than ever, as her eyes scanned his nervous face. He had taken great pains with his appearance, and wore a collar which was too high for him, and which compelled him to keep his head rather erect; his clothes looked too new, somehow, even to Eva's fond regard, and she stifled a little sigh.

"I suppose there's something about all of us that doesn't quite fit into the picture," she thought humbly.

They were shown into a large drawing-room furnished in the not very beautiful taste of half a century ago; the blinds were drawn, and there was an air of general formality about everything.

They were kept waiting some time before Kitty

appeared; Peter had walked round the room at least twenty times before the door opened to admit her.

When she saw Eva she stood quite still.

"They did not tell me *you* were here," she said. She forced a smile. "How do you do! I've been meaning to call, but I've been so very much engaged. . . . Well, Peter!" She gave him her hand, which the poor boy grasped convulsively.

"I wondered whether you'd come to lunch with us to-day," Eva said. She tried hard to make her voice friendly, but she was painfully conscious that it was not very successful.

Kitty looked taken aback for a moment; she had long since withdrawn her hand from Peter's.

"There's nothing I should have liked better," she declared then. "I'm longing to see the flat—Philip tells me it is wonderful!" There was a gleam of maliciousness in her eyes. "But I've got a tiresome engagement—that's the worst of staying with relations, they will insist on dragging one here, there and everywhere, and one must be civil. . . ." She smiled at Peter. "Why didn't you let me know you were coming to town?" she asked sweetly. "Poor boy! I know I was cross with you last night, but I didn't mean it. . . ."

Peter coloured furiously; he stammered out that he had wanted to surprise her. . . . Eva could see that he was completely taken in by Kitty's sweetness, and that at the first kind word and look he had forgotten the hurt of last night.

She rose from her chair.

"Then I won't stay," she said. She looked questioningly at Peter.

"I'm going to keep Peter half an hour and then send him home," Kitty said laughingly. "Only half an hour! That's all I can spare him this morning. . . ." She swept the boy a look from beneath her long lashes. "I'll just see Eva to the door. . . ."

Eva followed silently. She was burning with indignation for Peter's sake; what a way to treat a man whom one was supposed to love!

"You'll give my love to Phil, won't you?" Kitty asked, as they shook hands. "I really am coming to call—I promised him I would. . . ."

Eva walked away with crimson cheeks.

"If that's being well bred, I'm glad I'm not," she thought indignantly. She could not understand how Peter could be so blind; she was quite sure in her heart that Kitty did not mean to marry him, and she deeply



represented the patronising way in which she and Peter had both been treated.

She went back to the flat feeling very sad. She wondered what sort of a man Featherstone was, and if there was really any foundation for Peter's outburst of jealousy last night.

Through the half-closed library door she saw Philip writing at his desk; she hesitated a moment, then went into the room.

"Philip."

"Yes."

There was a little additional colour in his face as he looked up; he had grown so used to hearing her step pass his door.

"I've just been with Peter—to see Kitty Arlington."

"Yes."

"I asked her to lunch, but she wouldn't come."

"No." The indifference of his voice angered her.

"She sent her love to you," she said deliberately.

"Thank you." There was a little pause. "Is that all you came to say to me?" Philip asked.

She fidgeted with a paper weight.

"Yes—no—at least—what sort of a man is Mr. Featherstone?"

"Featherstone?" Oh, he's all right—good family and all that, you know. Why do you ask?"

She hesitated. It hurt her pride to have to admit that Peter was jealous of Featherstone.

"I only thought . . . he seemed—well, he goes about a great deal with Kitty, doesn't he?"

She raised her eyes with sudden pathos in them; Philip was looking at her steadily, and for the moment she forgot the strained relationship that existed between them, and remembered only her anxiety for her brother; she stretched her hand to him across the table. "Oh, do you think that Miss Arlington means to marry Peter?" she appealed.

Philip did not answer at once; his eyes wandered to the hand that wore his ring and back again to her face; his voice was rather brusque when he spoke.

"No, I never did think so," he said.

She gazed at him, the colour flushing her face.

"Oh—what—do you mean?" she asked at last.

Philip shrugged his shoulders.

"You asked me, and I have told you what I think. It may sound brutal, but . . . well, you know as well as I do that she can't ever have really cared for him . . . he's too young—too . . ."

Eva raised passionate eyes.

"Too much like me, I suppose, you mean?" she finished for him. "You mean that nobody could ever care for us except for our money, is that it?" She did not wait for his reply. "If it's that," she said hoarsely, "he ought to be glad if she throws him over now and ends it; he ought to be glad if she doesn't marry him . . . Oh, if I could only make him understand what it means; if I could only tell him!" She stopped, afraid of her own intensity.

Philip had turned very white.

"You mean . . . you mean that it's as bad as that—being married—to me!" he asked.

Eva controlled herself with an effort; she tried to laugh.

"Well," she said shakily, "we're not—very—happy—either of us—are we?"

"No."

"And I'm so fond of Peter," she went on. "I couldn't bear to see his life spoilt."

Philip laughed roughly.

"Peter will have to look after himself and get out of his troubles—like the rest of us—as best he can," he said rather drearily.

### CHAPTER XXXIII

Peter looked quite happy when he turned up at lunch time; Kitty had managed to get out of her engagement for the evening, he announced, and he was taking her out to dinner.

"She wants you and Phil to come, too," he said. "You will, won't you, Bonnie?" He fidgeted with his collar. "You hardly know her at all, you know," he pleaded. "And she is so anxious for you both to come."

Eva was conscious of a little pang; of course, it was Philip whom Kitty wanted; she laughed as she turned away.

"I'll come, if you really mean it. I don't know about Philip—you'd better ask him."

Peter stared.

"He'll come if you do, surely!" he insisted.

"He may have an engagement—he knows so many people in town," Eva answered. "You'd better ask him at lunch."

Peter was a little perplexed; he had only been in the flat a few hours, but already he was beginning to wonder. A dozen times he had found himself remembering his sister's wedding day, and the tragedy in her eyes as she clung to him for a moment before she and Philip went away

"There's something wrong somewhere," he told himself. "What the d'ckens can it be? I'll ask Calligan."

He found himself watching his brother-in-law curiously at lunch time; there was something about him that baffled Peter.

Philip laughed and talked enough—it wasn't that, but Peter had the curious feeling that he was an onlooker at a badly-acted play, and that neither of the actors succeeded in being convincing.

"Peter wants to take us out to dinner to-night," Eva said presently. "Will you be able to come, or have you an engagement?"

"Dinner?" Philip looked at his brother-in-law.

"I'm taking Kitty," Peter explained, flushing a little. He always felt somehow defiant when he spoke of Kitty to Philip. "She—we—thought you and Eva would come too."

"I shall be delighted."

"He only accepted when he heard that Kitty wanted him," Eva thought bitterly.

She made up her mind that she would look her very best that night—that she would outshine Kitty by every means in her power.

"What about Calligan?" Peter said suddenly. "Wasn't he coming round this evening? I know he said something about it last night. Perhaps he'll come too?"

"I'm sure he'd love to," Eva said quickly. "We'll ring him up after lunch and ask."

There was unmistakable eagerness in her voice, and both men looked at her quickly.

There was an uncomfortable misgiving in Peter's heart; a thought for which he hated himself crept into his mind.

Was Bonnie flirting with Calligan? It was about the last thing in the world he should ever have suspected her of doing, and yet, more than once since his arrival last night, the unwilling suspicion had suggested itself to him.

"He'll be odd man out if he comes," he said rather shortly. "He won't mind being put off for once surely? You can explain——"

"He won't mind being odd man out either," Eva insisted. "I should like him to meet Kitty again, too; he told me that he met her a long time ago—last spring, I think—he recognised her at the wedding."

Peter glanced at Philip, but Philip seemed quite undisturbed, and he gave up the argument with a shrug of his shoulders.

If Philip didn't mind, well, it was nobody else's business.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

"OH, ma'am!" said Manders, in an awed voice, "you look just like a bride."

She stood on the threshold of Eva's bedroom, her eyes wide with admiration as she gazed at her mistress.

Eva turned slowly from the long glass.

"Do I!—it is my wedding dress, you know." She touched the clinging white folds with tender fingers; she had put away so many beautiful dreams and hopes with the soft silk, and never till to-night had she found the courage to raise the lid and look at them again.

But it all came back to her with a rush now, as she stood there in the light and looked at her slender figure in the glass.

She suddenly became aware that the girl in the doorway was watching her curiously, and she roused herself from her dreaming with a start.

"Do you want me, Manders?"

"No, ma'am—at least—Mr. Dennison asked me to say that he had gone on to fetch Miss Arlington, and would you and the master please meet them. He said you would know where."

"Very well."

The door closed softly, and Eva gave a little quick sigh.

So she and Philip were to be thrust into a tête-à-tête drive after all! She hardly knew if she were glad or sorry; she gave another long look at her reflection.

The white frock suited her exquisitely; the diamond pendant, Philip had given her, gleamed on her white neck—she had dressed her hair more loosely than usual and it curled softly about her forehead and ears, giving her a very young appearance. She wondered if Philip would recognise what dress it was she was wearing.

Calligan would notice it, she knew—and then she felt ashamed of the thought, and turned swiftly away from the glass.

She supposed Philip was ready and waiting—she opened her door and went out on to the landing, and at the same moment Philip's door opened too, and he appeared on the threshold.

He was still in his shirt-sleeves, with an expanse of shirt-front, and he held a black tie in his hand.

"Would you mind?" he began, then stopped, and a little wave of emotion crossed his face. His quick eyes

had at a single glance taken in the beauty of his wife's appearance, but after that first curious little flicker he showed no sign of having noticed it.

"I was going to ask you if you would mind tying this thing for me," he said apologetically. "I can generally manage it myself, but my fingers seem all thumbs to-night."

He held the black tie to her.

"I don't know if you mind," he said again.

Eva's heart seemed to throb somewhere in the region of her throat, but she managed to answer lightly:

"Not at all—I've often done it for father and the boys." She took the tie from him. "I'm afraid you'll have to stoop," she said rather breathlessly.

Philip obeyed; he kept his eyes cast down, and Eva fastened the tie into a not very successful bow.

It was the first time he had ever asked even a small service of her, and it gave her a curious sense of intimacy with him. She thought of the night when she had put her arms round his neck and kissed him of her own accord, and wondered what would happen were she to do it again; the desire was so strong that she almost had to force her hands to her sides.

"There—will that do?" she asked.

"Thanks." He turned to move away and their hands touched. Almost unconsciously Philip's fingers closed about her's—he looked at her with a little flash half of irony, half sadness in his eyes, then he bent and kissed her hand.

He let it go almost immediately and turned away.

"Do you remember when I was last guilty of such an offence?" he asked lightly.

He went back to his room without waiting for an answer, and Eva went on to the drawing-room and stood looking down into the fire.

She hid the hand which Philip had kissed in the folds of her dress. Of course, he had meant nothing—nothing at all, she told herself with severity, but all the same—

"Ready?" he asked from the doorway.

He had finished the rest of his toilet with amazing quickness; he was climbing into an overcoat as he spoke.

"I've sent for a taxicab," he told her. "I didn't feel like driving the car to-night." He looked at her bare arms and neck. "Aren't you going to wear a cloak or something?"

"Yes, my coat." He took it from her and helped her into its softness; they avoided each other's eyes; there was a sort of tension in the air of which they were both a little afraid.

Philip fidgeted round the room. He had a curiously light-headed sort of feeling. He wondered if it was because the room was rather warm.

"I wish that confounded cab would come!" he said.

A bell rang.

"I expect that is it," Eva said. She tried to speak composedly, but her racing heart-beats seemed to get into her voice and make it breathless and uneven.

Philip turned.

"You'd better do your coat up," he said jerkily. "It's cold out. I——" He broke off as their eyes met.

There was a little silence; then Philip took a step towards her. "Eva"—he spoke her name hoarsely; he half-held out his hand.

"Mr. Calligan!" said the maid at the door.

Eva gave a long sigh. She said afterwards that she felt as if someone had pushed her out of heaven as Calligan came smilingly into the room.

It was not his fault, poor man! The arrangement had been of Eva's own making, only she had forgotten it; but she felt that she almost hated him as he came to her now, sure of his welcome.

Philip had gone into the hall. The taxi was at the door, and he went out on to the path, bare-headed as he was, and stood there in the darkness.

He could have struck Calligan with pleasure, but he was not sure that he did not owe him some gratitude.

He had been on the verge of making a fool of himself once again, he supposed, and Calligan had prevented it.

He sat beside Eva in the taxi because Calligan insisted, but he kept as far away from her as possible, though the consciousness of her near presence went to his head like wine, and the longing to touch her, to just lay his hand on hers, was almost irresistible.

Once the sudden swerving of the cab threw her lightly against his arm, and he heard her laugh nervously in the darkness. He wondered what she was thinking; what sort of a snubbing she would have dealt out to him this time but for Calligan's timely interruption.

He could not guess from the way in which she talked trivialities and kept up a fire of banter with his friend, that her heart was bleak with disappointment, or that she was merely riding in a shabby, rather stuffy taxicab instead of the fairy coach with golden wheels which for one mad moment she had imagined was to call at the flat and carry her and Philip to the land where dreams come true.

"I'm going to enjoy myself to-night," she said flippantly.

"I hope Peter has ordered a good dinner—that sounds greedy, doesn't it?" She laughed. "I never thought the time would ever come when I should look forward to what I was going to eat, but it has! I wonder what it's a sign of—advancing age, do you think, Mr. Calligan?"

"Hunger, I should think," he answered laughingly. "Anyway, here we are, so you won't have long to wait."

He got out first, and as he gave her his hand he saw her face in the light from the big restaurant to which they were going. She looked like a flushed, radiant child who had been wakened from sleep by the kiss of a fairy prince.

She went on up the steps ahead of him, and he followed soberly with Philip.

Peter and Kitty were waiting for them. Peter looked rather downcast—Kitty had not been kind; she had blamed him for coming alone to fetch her—it looked so absurd, she said pettishly; why could he not have waited for Philip—and the others?

Her eyes went straight to Philip as he joined them; Peter's jealous eyes saw a difference in the smile with which she greeted his brother-in-law.

But for Calligan the dinner would have been a failure. Peter was silent and moody. Kitty drank a little too much champagne and her laugh was a little too loud sometimes and her voice too shrill.

She sat between Philip and Peter, and the white shoulder with its too slender strap was nearly always turned to Peter. She talked to Philip almost exclusively, and Calligan wondered that his friend could be so foolish as to permit it.

She was not in the same street with Eva, he thought with loyal indignation. Kitty might have a line of ancestors that dated back to the Flood for all he knew or cared, but her small, dolly prettiness was as a rushlight compared with the sunshine of the dear woman whom he loved.

He woke from the reverie into which he had fallen to hear Kitty say:

"Do you remember the last time we were here, Phil? How long ago is it? We sat over at that table in the corner there. Do you remember? And you bought some pink roses——"

"Because you asked for them, Miss Arlington, I'll be bound," Calligan struck in laughingly.

Kitty turned on him angrily. She did not like Calligan.

"I have never been in the unfortunate position of having to ask Philip for anything," she said.

Eva bit her lip to hide its trembling. Her eyes sought her husband's, but he was too intent on Kitty, and with an effort she controlled herself.

She was sorry for Peter. Her heart ached when she looked at his pale, sullen face. She was angry with Philip. She was used to being hurt by him, but now he was including Peter too she felt it was more than she could stand.

She deliberately devoted herself to Calligan. He was ready enough to talk to her, but to-night even his devotion and admiration passed her by. She longed for the dinner to end.

Would things have been any different if Calligan had not come! she wondered. What would Philip have said to her that moment in the drawing-room had there been no interruption?

Only once did she succeed in meeting his eyes, and then the hard bitterness of them made her heart leap.

Was he—oh, could he be jealous after all? But he looked away so quickly she could not be sure.

It had come on to rain heavily when they left the restaurant, and there was trouble in getting taxis.

"We can't all go in one, that's very sure," Calligan said cheerily when only one was forthcoming. He looked round at Peter. "Who's going in this?" he asked. "Will you, Mrs. Winterdick?"

Eva moved a step towards her husband. It required almost a physical effort for her to speak.

"Philip—shall we—will you—shall you and I—"

He looked down at her with dispassionate eyes.

"No, that's not fair!" he said, laughing a little wildly.

"An old married couple like we are! I'm going to take Miss Arlington if she will have me . . ."

Kitty laughed shrilly.

"Of course I will—come along!" She slipped a hand through his arm. Eva had fallen back. She was trembling so she could hardly stand. For a moment everything swam dizzily before her eyes. Like one in a dream she saw Philip hand Kitty into the taxi—saw Peter push Calligan aside and follow them determinedly—and the next moment the cab had whirled away, and she and Calligan were left alone in the wet, chilly night.

## CHAPTER XXXV

"Well, that settles it," said Calligan ruefully. He looked down at Eva, but she had drawn the big collar of



her coat closely round her throat and he could hardly see her face. The rain was teeming down again, and splashing up from the pavement in miniature waterspouts.

"There'll be no chance of a cab yet, I'm afraid, Calligan said. "We'd better go back inside and wait."

He put his hand through Eva's arm and drew her back into the wide lounge from which they had just come.

A good many people were in a similar plight; outside in the street there was a perpetual blowing of whistles; commissionaires in shiny mackintoshes dashed out into the rain now and then to try and commandeer a passing taxicab.

Eva had sunk down on one of the wide, soft lounges; her mind was in a turmoil, her heart was throbbing with wounded pride.

She had made her poor little overture and it had been repulsed; it only showed how little that kiss on her hand had meant.

Never again! never again! she told herself wildly; she blamed herself cruelly for having broken through her determination even this once. Kitty did not seem to matter so much—she hardly considered her—but the deliberate snub from Philip had cut her to the soul.

"I've ordered more coffee," Calligan said, rejoicing her. "We may as well be as comfortable as we can. It's useless to think of going on for the present. Let me take your coat."

Eva unfastened it with stiff fingers and let him take it from her; she leaned back against the cushions and tried to shake off the feeling of faintness that was stealing over her.

Calligan's voice and kind eyes looked a long way off; she struggled out of the sea of mists feeling cold and shivering.

The hot coffee did her good—the colour stole back to her cheeks.

"I wonder where the others have gone?" Calligan said. "I never thought to ask. . . ."

"I think they will probably go to our flat," Eva answered. "I heard Kitty tell Philip she would like to see it."

"I see. Well, Phil will know that you are safe with me."

"Yes." She hated the thought of Philip showing Kitty their home.

The one grain of comfort she could find lay in the knowledge that Peter was with them—poor Peter!

Calligan had not seen what had happened outside; he was blissfully unconscious of his companion's distress.

"What are you thinking about?" he asked presently.

He looked down at her with a little smile

She raised her eyes slowly to his face.

"I was just trying to—to make up my mind to something," she said.

"Well, what is the difficulty? Tell me and let me decide."

She turned her head away.

"I can't—because. . . ." She laughed a little wildly.

"Well—because it's about you, you see."

"About me?" He sat staring straight ahead of him.

"Well, if it's about me," he said lightly, "do exactly as you would prefer—I mean, decide whichever way you feel that you want to."

"You wouldn't say that if you knew what it was," she told him in a quivering voice.

"I should—whatever it was," he answered steadily.

"I'm your friend—that is my mission in life. I often used to wonder what it really was—till I met you."

"People say that friendship between a man and a woman is impossible."

"Do they?" He sounded unconvinced. "We must be the exception that proves the rule then."

She looked at him half fearfully. His voice had sounded sincere and honest enough, and his eyes were quite steady as they met hers.

"If I could only be sure—sure. . . ." she said almost in a whisper.

Sure that she was not going to irretrievably hurt him, she meant. Sure that this last desperate throw which was all there was left to her would not drag this man into the whirlpool of unhappiness that seemed to be engulfing them all.

"Look here," said Calligan simply. "I don't know what you are worrying about or what is in your mind, but—" he laid his hand over hers. "If there is anything I can do—anything that will be of the least use to you or help you—or—make you the smallest bit happier don't hesitate to make use of me. That's why I'm here—"

He smiled suddenly, and for a moment his rather ordinary face looked almost beautiful.

"Honest Injun!" he said.

He pressed her hand hard for a moment, then rose.

"I'll just go and see what the heavens are doing," he said.

He came back in a moment.

"Pouring cats and dogs," he said cheerily. "But I've told the gentleman in the shiny mackintosh that we can't

wait any longer, and that it will pay him to see that the next stray cab is ours, so we may hope."

He sat down again beside her.

"And is the great decision made?" he asked. "And if so, mayn't I know what it is?"

She shook her head.

"I'm afraid to tell you—Oh, please forget that I ever said anything about it."

"You mean that my friendship doesn't count?" he asked.

"I don't understand."

"You mean that you don't trust me sufficiently to be able to tell me this—whatever it is?"

"I do trust you—I trust you more than anyone in all the world."

He held out his hand.

"Then tell me."

A porter approached.

"We've got you a taxi, sir. . . ."

Eva rose with a sigh of relief; she put on her coat hurriedly.

Outside, the rain had abated; Calligan spoke to the driver just as they started.

"Drive round for half an hour."

"Why did you tell him that?" Eva asked as he took his seat beside her. They will be wondering. . . ."

"They won't—they'll understand," Calligan answered.

"And I want to know what this is that you are afraid to tell me."

"I'm ashamed . . . you'll think so badly of me."

"Try me and see," he said, gently.

She looked away from him out of the window at the soaking street and darkness, and it seemed to her that this was the last chance she would ever be given. She had bungled everything so badly before—she could not hope to go on getting fresh chances again and again.

"Well—I'm waiting," Calligan said.

She turned to him with sudden abandon.

"You haven't ever loved anybody, have you?" she said.

"Not dreadfully, I mean—not so that you can't sleep for wanting them, or forget them for a single moment . . . not so that nothing else in all the world matters—have you?"

There was a little silence.

"Well—perhaps not," he admitted. "Go on. . . ."

"I think I've got to tell you," she said, wildly. "I think if I don't tell someone soon I shall go mad . . . but you won't ever tell anyone, will you, Mr. Calligan? You'll never let anyone know—promise me!"

"There is no need for me to promise—but I will." He

was holding her hands now, though he did not remember having taken them, or she having given them into his clasp, but the firm grip was somehow comforting, and her voice was a little quieter when she spoke.

"It's—Philip! That's how I love him! I've tried not to—I've tried everything, and I should die if I thought he knew, but—but I can't bear it any longer, so I've got to ask you to help me. He never cared for me—but you know that! You've always known it, only you were such a dear, you pretended not to. Oh, I know you did!" as he would have spoken. "And now he's going away—he's going to leave me—and I can't bear it—I can't bear it—I can't!" Her voice rose hysterically; she rocked herself to and fro in a passion of despair. Now she had let herself go, now she had opened the long pent-up store of suffering, it seemed to be carrying her away with it. The tears rained down her face, sobbing shook her from head to foot.

Calligan kept her hands closely in his. Once he raised them and held them for a moment against his lips, but she hardly realised it, and presently her passion spent itself and she lay back exhausted.

There was a little silence; then Calligan said with infinite gentleness:—

"And now tell me what you want me to do."

He had not asked a single question; had given no sign of what he was feeling. A little smothered sob broke from the girl at his side.

"You'll think I am mad if I tell you—but it's my only chance. There's only two months—perhaps not so much, and then he'll be gone, and if he goes. . . ."

"You mean Philip? Where is he going?"

"He said Rhodesia—he said nothing was settled, but I know it is—I know it is, and he won't tell me."

Calligan released her hand sadly; he let down the window with a run, letting in the cool, wet air.

"That's better," he said; he changed his seat to one opposite her. For a moment he had felt as if he were stifling; blind fury against Philip had gripped him like a live thing.

"One minute," he said gently. "Tell me—if this is true—I hate to ask you—but . . . why did Philip—why . . ."

"You mean why did he marry me?" She drew a hard breath. "I can't tell you that—it isn't my secret. . . . I can't ever tell anyone."

"Very well. I didn't mean to be curious. And now you say he is going away. Why?"

"I don't know—unless—oh, I suppose he finds it impos-

sible to go on living with me—I suppose he does. He hates the flat—he hates London . . . sometimes . . . sometimes I think he hates me, too.”

“No . . . no . . .”

She gave a little choking laugh.

“I suppose I haven’t any pride, or I should let him go, and not care! But I can’t. I want him to stay, Mr. Calligan—I can’t go on living without him. You don’t know what it is to care for anyone as much as I do for him. I wish I didn’t—oh, I’d give anything if I didn’t.” She caught her breath sobbingly. “But I shall never be able to change that—till I die . . . and so . . . I thought perhaps—if you. . . .”

“You mean that you want me to speak to him—to. . .”

“No . . . no . . .”

“I’m sorry,” said Calligan humbly. “I’m afraid I’m very stupid. Don’t be afraid to tell me—I’ll do it, whatever it is. . . .”

Eva hid her face in her hands. She had never believed that she could ever bring herself to do this thing, and yet now, somehow, it seemed a small price to pay in order to gain her desire.

“I think . . . once or twice I have thought . . . he was—jealous—of you,” she said in a broken whisper. “I hope you won’t be angry. I know, of course, that there never was any need for him to mind—but—I thought—if you wouldn’t mind just letting him think that you liked me—more than you—really—do, I mean!” Her voice died away in a shamed whisper.

Calligan sat very still. He knew what she was asking of him, and for a moment he wondered dully if she had even the faintest conception of what it meant to him.

He leaned over and touched her.

“There must be no mistake my dear,” he said. “I want to help you—but first . . . will you make sure—sure that Philip—that you are not mistaken in what you think? Have you ever said anything to him? There may be some great misunderstanding between you. I have known Philip for years. He’s a good, straight chap . . .” It cost him an effort to say it, but he knew it was only just. “You ought to give him every chance—to meet him—if necessary—more than half-way. . . Don’t misunderstand me—” as she gave a little shiver.

It seemed a long time before she answered.

“I’ve done everything—everything,” she said brokenly. She thought of the several poor little overtures that had so woefully miscarried—the note he had never answered—her appeal this evening, and it seemed to her that all doors were closed to her save this one

Calligan was turning things over in his mind, trying to sort them out.

Of himself he did not think at all; he only wanted to do what was the best for Eva. He would have given his right hand any day to know that she was happy. Indignant as he had been with Philip, he had never guessed that the very heart of the tragedy lay in the fact that this girl loved him so passionately.

"Of course, you—you despise me, don't you?" she asked in a whisper.

"Despise you!" He almost laughed. He let the window down and calling to the driver, told him to go back to the flat. Then he turned to Eva again.

"Listen," he said gently. "And try not to misunderstand me. I'm much older than you. I want you to be happy more than anything else in the world—more, perhaps, than you will ever know. But this—this—thing you are suggesting. You haven't thought where it might lead, have you? I am not thinking of myself—there's no need to—but I'm thinking of you—and Philip. . . . You may be wrong and he may care for you all the time. If so, anything—anything else may lead to a final estrangement. I want to help you, and if you think it's any good, what you suggest, well, I'm with you all the way. But there's a risk. . . . The question is, ought I to let you take it?"

"It can make no difference, I can't lose more than I have done already. Oh, Mr. Calligan, can't you see that it's the only hope I have? Other women have done it—I've heard of it often. . . ."

Calligan smiled rather sadly.

"In books?" he asked.

"And in real life, too," she insisted excitedly. "After all, there's no risk to anyone but me."

She tried to read his face, but it was too dark.

"Mr. Calligan!" she said pleadingly.

He roused himself with a stifled sigh.

"Very well. . . . I'll agree on one condition. You must think it over for to-night—give him another chance. . . . and then. . . . then. . . . if to-morrow. . . ." He could not go on.

The taxicab stopped outside the flat and Calligan opened the door.

"Shall I come in?" he asked.

She laughed nervously.

"Oh, please!"

She waited while he paid the driver; as he turned to her again she asked him a timid question.

"Do I look as if I have been crying?"

He glanced at her and hurriedly away again.

"Only a little—go and bathe your eyes . . ."

Eva escaped to her room quickly; she could hear Kitty's shrill laugh in the drawing-room, and Philip's voice.

She took off her coat and hastily bathed her eyes; her pulses were jumping and she had to wait for a moment to calm herself; when at last she went to the drawing-room she was greeted by Kitty—

"So you have come at last! We were beginning to think you and Mr. Calligan had eloped."

Philip was standing by the mantelshelf, and through the glass above it he saw the quick way in which his wife looked at Calligan.

"We had to wait for the rain," Eva said. "We went back to the lounge and had some more coffee. There were ever so many other people waiting, too—it was a dreadful business to get a taxicab."

Her voice sounded a little mechanical.

Kitty laughed.

"It must have been," she said dryly. She threw away the cigarette she had been smoking and rose. "Well, now you have come I must go home. My people will be wondering what on earth has happened to me."

"There's no hurry," Eva protested. "It must be quite early."

Kitty walked across the room and pointed to the clock. "Half-past one my dear! That's the time," she said, dryly.

There was a little silence. Philip laughed.

Eva had flushed from chin to brow.

"Oh, but that can't be right—surely! . . . Peter!"

"Yes it is," said Peter. "You'd better put your coat on, Kitty. . . . I'll take you home."

Eva followed Kitty from the room. Her whole body felt flushed with shame. She avoided Kitty's searching eyes.

"I had no idea it was so late," she said, "I am so sorry—"

"My dear, there's no need to apologise," Kitty assured her, lightly. "I think Mr. Calligan is charming."

The hot blood rushed to Eva's face.

"I don't know what you mean!" she began, angrily, then stopped.

After all, was not this what she wished them to think? What she wished Philip to think? She forced a laugh.

"Well, I had no idea it was so late, certainly!" she said, lightly.

Calligan made an effort to leave with Kitty and Peter, but Philip stopped him; he might be suffering torments

of jealousy, but he would rather have died now than allow Calligan to guess it.

"Nonsense—you must have a drink first," he said. "Peter will be back directly, you must stay. Eva, tell him he must stay."

Eva pretended not to hear; already in her heart the pendulum had swung back, and she was telling herself that she could never go on with this thing; she was consumed with shame whenever she looked at Calligan.

When Kitty had gone she followed the two men back into the drawing-room.

"Well, I hope everyone has enjoyed the evening as much as I have," Philip said flippantly. He was mixing whisky and soda. He laughed suddenly. "Poor old Peter! If anybody was the odd man out, I am afraid it was he . . ." His voice was a little loud, and his face flushed.

"For which he has you to thank," Eva said quickly.

She would have given her life to recall the words as soon as they were spoken; she clenched her hands in her lap and waited for the burst of passion which she was sure would come from Philip, but he only laughed again.

"The pot mustn't call the kettle black, you know," he said indifferently. "And, after all, it's 'for one night only,' as I'm going to Apsley to-morrow."

Eva tried to speak, but no words would pass her lips; she just sat and stared at her husband.

She had never seen him look so excited, she thought—or so lovable, her heart added in aching parenthesis; he raised his tumbler and looked at her with mocking eyes.

"Well—here's luck!" he said carelessly.

"Apsley! Why are you going to Apsley?" Calligan asked.

His pallor was in strong contrast to his friend's flushed face; he looked like a man who was undergoing some severe strain.

Philip refilled his glass before he answered.

"I promised the mater to go down for the week-end," he said carelessly. "I want to tell her about Rhodesia, too."

Eva closed her eyes for a moment.

"I thought you told me you hadn't decided anything," she managed to say at last. Philip just glanced at her.

"I hadn't—then. . . ." He turned to Calligan. "I suppose Eva has told you about Faulkner's offer?" he asked.

"She said something—yes. But, of course, you're not serious! My dear Philip, it's—it's absurd!"

"Is it I'm going, all the same."



"But why in the world?" Calligan protested desperately.

Philip laughed.

"Now, I should have thought you would approve of it," he said. "You were always a globe-trotter. You used to tell me that I stayed at home too much."

"Yes, but now . . ."

"Now is the appointed time," Philip interrupted, flippantly.

"Have another Scotch? No? All right."

Calligan rose from his chair.

"Well, I'll be saying good-night," he said stiffly. "You'll be wanting to make an early start to-morrow, Mrs. Winterdick."

"Why don't you call her by her Christian name?" Philip asked boisterously. "She won't mind, and I'm sure I don't."

Eva had risen, too. She was as white as her wedding dress.

"I'm not going to Apsley to-morrow, Mr. Calligan," she said clearly. "Philip is going alone. I would far rather stay here."

"There's a compliment for you!" Philip said, recklessly.

Calligan swung round.

"Philip," he began harshly, but Philip only laughed. "Silly old owl! I'm only joking," he said. He let Eva see Calligan to the door. As they left the room they heard him break into the rollicking chorus of a song.

Calligan looked at Eva, and suddenly she covered her face with her hands—

"You see—" she said faintly. He caught her hand.

"Give him another chance—give him another chance," he said. He went away, shutting the door behind him. Eva stood for a long moment where he had left her. Another chance! Ah, but he did not want it! He had no use for her. She did not count in his life at all; he made all his plans independently of her wishes; she was no more to him than any other woman in the world—

But Calligan's voice rang urgently in her ears—"Give him another chance—give him another chance."

She roused herself with an effort and went back to the drawing room. "Philip—"

"Yes."

"Do you—would you rather that I came to Apsley with you to-morrow?" It cost her a tremendous effort to make the overture.

Philip turned round and faced her

"Come if you like," he said casually. "But it's not necessary."

She made a last effort.

"I thought perhaps your mother would think it strange if you—"

He laughed discordantly.

"Oh, don't worry about that. I can explain things. I can tell her that as Peter was here . . ."

"Very well." She waited a moment, more because she was afraid to trust her steps rather than from any desire to prolong the interview; then with an effort she turned to the door: "Good-night."

Philip did not answer.

She walked on, her head held erect. She went into her room and shut the door. She stood for a moment looking before her with blank eyes.

"I've given him his chance," she said aloud.

But even now, with her heart almost broken, she longed to go back to him. Once her fingers even closed on the door handle to turn it, but she forced them away again. "He doesn't want you—you little—fool!" she told herself fiercely.

"You've got to get used to being without him, so start from now, start from to-night."

Though she had not expected to do so, she fell into a heavy sleep as soon as her head touched the pillow. When she woke it was broad daylight and Manders was drawing the curtains back.

Eva started up.

"Is it late? I seem to have slept so heavily."

Manders smiled sympathetically.

"It's past ten, ma'am—I wanted to wake you, but the master wouldn't let me. He told me to say that he'd write."

Eva caught her breath.

"You mean—he's gone?"

"Yes, ma'am."

She lay back on the pillows weakly.

Gone! Without a word of good-bye! And Calligrah had begged her to give him another chance.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

EVA lunched alone. Peter had gone out early and left word that he did not know when he should be back. Eva sighed wearily. She supposed that last night would make more trouble between Peter and Kitty. She knew that

Peter had been seething with rage and jealousy all the evening.

The flat seemed very quiet without Philip. After lunch she went into the library and looked round with desolate eyes.

One of Philip's pipes with the ashes still in the bowl lay on the mantel-shelf. A tweed coat of his was tossed across a chair-back. A letter which he had commenced and left unfinished still lay on the blotter. Eva went across and looked at it. It began: "Dear Mother . . ." She wondered what Mrs. Winterdick would say when Philip arrived alone.

After all, it did not much matter. Things could only get worse as time went on, till soon there would be no need of explanation.

And—Calligan! She thought of him apathetically. What would he do now? Did he intend to take seriously what she had asked of him last night? The memory of her words no longer made her cheeks burn. She did not know whether she still wanted to struggle to win her husband's love. But she did want to distract herself, to try and smother her own acute unhappiness.

Peter came in while she was wandering round Philip's room. He looked rather pale and constrained. He avoided his sister's eyes.

He had had lunch, he said—with Kitty, he added, with a note of defiance.

Eva said nothing, and suddenly he broke out:—

"What on earth possessed Philip last night? If I didn't know I should have thought he had been drinking."

His sister's cheeks flamed.

"What do you mean?" she asked quietly.

He began to bluster. He looked very like his father at that moment.

"What do I mean! You know very well what I mean! The way he treated Kitty—he—he made things abominable for her! What could she do? I—I was angry with her this morning, but I can see now that it was not really her fault. She explained the whole thing to me."

Eva's lips curled bitterly.

"What did she explain?" she asked.

"Why—all the tomfoolery that went on," he said roughly. "I wouldn't have believed it of Philip—it . . . it was an insult to you besides being—being most embarrassing for Kitty. I suppose I ought to have said something at the time, but with you there. . . ."

Eva laughed.

"You need not trouble about me, my dear," she said. "Say what you like to Philip—I promise not to object or interfere."

He stared at her.

"What—what the deuce is the matter with you two?" he asked at last in bewilderment.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Matter! Nothing! We've only agreed to go our own and separate ways. It seems to me that most married people come to it sooner or later. Perhaps we've come a little sooner than most. . . ."

"But . . . but you were so keen on him! I knew you were long before—before . . ." He broke off in dismay. "Weren't you, Bonnie?" he asked.

She could not meet his eyes.

"I thought I was—put it that way," she said as lightly as she could. "We all make mistakes. I only hope you'll profit by mine, Peter dear—"

He laughed rather self-consciously.

"Oh I shall be all right," he said awkwardly. "I didn't understand how things were until Kitty explained. But now I know it was Philip's fault."

Eva opened her lips to say something about Featherstone, but she closed them again resolutely. After all, what was the use?

Peter was watching her uneasily.

"Where is Philip?" he asked suddenly.

She answered without looking at him.

"He's gone home—to Apsley." She laughed, with a little hysterical note in her voice. "Isn't it generally the wife who runs home to her mother?" she asked flippantly. "I'm afraid we've done it the wrong way."

Peter caught her by the shoulders as she was leaving the room.

"Bonnie, are you? What are you going to do here—alone?"

"I'm not alone." She tried to wriggle free of him.

"There's you—and Mr. Calligan."

"Calligan!" said Peter, wrathfully.

She raised burning eyes.

"Well! What have you got to say about him?"

Peter coloured.

"Nothing—at least . . . I used to like the chap, but now . . ."

"But now!" she echoed, as he paused. "You mean that you've changed your mind? Oh, well, it doesn't matter. I like him very much, however."

Peter let her go. His young face was full of honest trouble.

He loved his sister, and his heart was torn between love for her and loyalty to Kitty.

Kitty had been very clever that morning because it suited her not to quarrel with Peter for the moment. She disarmed him at the start by carrying the war into the enemy's camp.

"You were horrid last night," she said. "How could you behave as you did, Peter? I never was so unhappy . . ."

Peter was utterly taken aback.

"Unhappy!" he stammered. He had thought he had had the monopoly of that particular emotion.

She nodded—her golden head against his shoulder.

"Yes . . . you never spoke to me—you hardly looked at me—you let that dreadful Philip make love to me. . ."

"Kitty!"

"So you did!" Her voice was muffled. "What could I do! You looked on and apparently did not care. I thought—I thought the only thing left to do was for me to pretend that I didn't care either."

He made her look at him.

"You mean that you would rather have been with me?"

She put her arms round his neck. She had always found it a most successful method of settling an argument. And afterwards, when Peter was trying to think it all out it seemed to him that the whole thing had died a natural death in kisses and foolish words.

But now, after having seen Eva, he was not so sure. If Philip had paid Kitty exaggerated attention, she, too, had not seemed at all disinclined to receive it. And, much as he loved her, now he was away from her immediate influence, Peter realised that she had not been free from blame.

It worried him, too, that Philip should be his sister's husband. Dash it all, the man had not played the game! He wished Philip had been here, so that he could have had the whole thing out with him in once and for all. Why on earth did he want to go racing off to Apsley? And without Bonnie, too? And with that chap Calligan hanging round! He scowled—wasn't Calligan a white man, either? He had been so sure of them both, these two.

"I'm going to a theatre with Mr. Calligan, to-night," Eva told him when they were having tea together. She met his eyes defiantly as she spoke, and Peter coloured anxiously.

"Well, can't I come, too—and bring Kitty?" he asked. Sae shook her head.

"We've only got two seats. We'll go together another night. You won't mind?"

"That isn't the point," he said gruffly. "You—you've no right to be racing about with Calligan. I'd only

been married such a little time as you and Philip, I'd break another man's head for even suggesting taking my wife out without me."

Eva laughed till the tears came into her eyes. The thought of Philip being sufficiently jealous of Calligan to want to break his head struck her as decidedly funny.

"There's no harm in going to a theatre with Mr. Calligan," she said lightly. "We've got two stalls—not even a box. So you see it's all very proper."

"It's not proper at all," Peter declared angrily. "What in the name of all that's holy has come over you, Bonnie! You're so flippant and cynical sometimes I hardly recognise you—"

Eva turned her head away.

"I hardly recognise myself sometimes," she said with a quick sigh. "That's marriage, I suppose! You'll find it out when you married, Peter."

"It's all rot!" he insisted. "You're not the sort to have changed like this without some big reason . . . Eva—you remember your wedding-day—up on the landing, just before you and Philip left . . ."

She rose hurriedly.

"I don't remember anything. I hate looking back! I want to look on all the time! Don't preach, Peter, there's a dear. It's all right—there's no harm at all in my going out with Mr. Calligan—"

"And I say there is!" Peter almost shouted. He was red in the face and his eyes blazed.

His sister stared at him.

"I don't know what you mean," she said suddenly quiet. "Why is there harm—in what way do you mean . . . Mr. Calligan—"

"Calligan's in love with you, that's why," Peter said roughly. "I may be a fool, but I could see that—ages ago."

He turned away as he spoke. He was younger than Eva and he and his brothers had always been accustomed to regard her as a sort of second mother; it struck him as terrible presumption on his part to have dared to call her to account at all.

He might have felt justified had he seen the tell-tale colour that rushed to her face.

After a moment she managed to laugh.

"Well, of course, if you will be so perfectly absurd!" she said.

Peter did not answer, and she followed him to the window and slipped a hand through his arm.

"Don't grudge me my friends," she said. "I haven't many—and Mr. Calligan . . ."

"Calligan isn't a friend—if Philip can't see what's going on, he's either blind or . . . Well—perhaps I had better not say any more," he added grimly.

"No, I shouldn't," she told him lightly. "You're a dear old thing, but there's no need for all this melodrama. Really! I know what I'm doing, and . . . and—there you are!" she finished lamely.

Peter asked a last question.

"You still mean to go with him to-night?"

"Certainly."

He stuck out his chin in his father's obstinate way.

"Very well," he said darkly.

He walked out of the room feeling very upset. He was not at all sure that he ought not to wire to Philip. He hated to think that perhaps Philip did not care. Perhaps if he spoke to Calligan himself. . . . but he dismissed that as an impossible plan; after all, Calligan had done nothing!

"Is Calligan calling for you?" he asked Eva at dinner.

She had been particularly gay and bright, much more so than he had ever seen her when her husband was present. It made him sick to think that perhaps this was how all romance ended—in disillusionment and mutual indifference.

She was wearing a frock he had not seen before—Peter was always quick to notice a woman's clothes—and it seemed to him to make things a thousand times worse. Bonnie was not at all the sort of girl to dress up for any man unless she particularly wanted to interest him.

"Of course, he is," she answered laughingly. "Did you think I was going to call for him?" She looked at his gloomy face, and suddenly she leaned over, laying a hand on his arm. "Peter, will you feel any better if I tell you that I asked Mr. Calligan to take me—that it wasn't his idea at all?"

"You asked him? Rubbish!"

"I did, honour bright! I got the tickets and 'phoned to him this morning."

"But why—why in Heaven's name?" he asked blankly.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Why does anyone do anything?" she asked.

Peter pushed his plate away.

"I think you're bewitched," he said.

"Am I?" She pushed her hair back with a little weary gesture.

"Look here," said Peter swiftly, "I'm your brother, and if there's going to be any nonsense I shall write to Philip. . . . You know what the Winterdicks are—if there should be any scandal—"

She flushed angrily and her nostrils dilated.

"Oh, I know! Say it! Say it!" she defied him. "There's never been any scandal attached to the women of Philip's family yet—I've heard it all before!" She laughed shrilly, rising to her feet as the door opened.

Calligan entered.

"Peter and I are having a friendly squabble," she told him with a laugh. "I'm so glad you've come—I was being unmercifully bullied. . . . I'm quite ready."

## CHAPTER XXXVII

It was about two o'clock on an autumn afternoon when Philip reached Apsley. The country was looking its loveliest, he thought; up there in London he had almost forgotten how good the fields and hedges smelt, and what glorious tints of red and yellow the artist hand of early October could paint into a landscape. He had not told them at home that he would be coming, so there was nobody to meet him. He left his suit-case at the station, and set off to walk to the Highway House. He was glad to be back again—he expanded his lungs and drew a deep breath of the fresh country air. Until this moment he had not realised how heartily he detested London; his thoughts flew ahead to the hunting—the gallop over fields and ditches—and the wild, exhilarating rush through the cool air.

The old "Guv'nor" would not be here this year! The thought brought a cloud to his brow; so many things seemed to have gone out with his father—the whole world seemed to have turned upside down since that sunny morning when he married Eva Dennison.

He wondered what she was doing and if she had been even faintly hurt because he had not said good-bye to her. The thought of last night made him ashamed. He knew he had made a fool of himself with Kitty Arlington, and it seemed all the worse because he had no spark of feeling of any kind left for her. He supposed that Peter had been mad, too! The ghost of a smile crossed his face at the remembrance of his brother-in-law's black looks! Poor old Peter! It had been rather hard that, though he had paid the piper, he had not been allowed to call the tune.

He took a short cut across some fields to avoid going through the village; he got a glimpse of the Dennisons' house through some trees on the right, and for the first time it occurred to him that they might think it strange he had come home without Eva. He had arranged an



excuse to give his mother, but old Dennison had not hitherto entered into his calculations.

He shrugged his shoulders and turned in at the gates of the Highway House. A couple of his father's Airedales came bounding from the stables as they heard his step. They barked vociferously when he spoke to them, jumping up and pawing him in an excess of delight; they ran ahead of him to the house uttering little cries of welcome.

Philip's face glowed. It was worth staying away for a few weeks, after all, since it made him appreciate the old place like this. He went round to a side door which was always kept open and let himself into the house quietly; then he walked to the foot of the staircase and called to his mother.

"Philip!" There was a little cry of delight, and the next moment she was in his arms.

Presently she held him off and looked into his face with fond, tear-dimmed eyes.

"Phil! Oh, my dear boy! Why didn't you tell me you were coming?—I'd have met you—or sent the car. Oh, it is good to see you again! And Eva . . ." He felt that she looked beyond him to the empty hall, and he answered hurriedly—

"She hasn't come; Peter's staying with her, so I left them to do a round of the theatres. She's coming down for the week-end or something." He made a comical little grimace. "You mean that I'm not welcome alone?"

"My darling boy!" She kissed him again, though there was a little note of anxiety in her voice. "But I wish you had brought her, Phil—I should like to have seen her. Besides . . . won't people think it strange, dear? You've only been married such a little time!"

Philip frowned.

"What does it matter what people say! It's such twaddle . . ."

She released him slowly.

"One has to mind what people say, whether it's twaddle or not," she said with a little wavering smile. "Besides . . . Phil, do you know that your father and I were never separated for one single day! He never went away without me. And I . . . well, of course, I never wished to go away without him."

Philip laughed rather constrainedly.

"And very nice, too," he said. "But—things are different now, you know, mother. Besides—everything's all right—Eva could have come if she liked. She's got Peter there. She said she would rather stay with him."

Mrs. Winterdick knew Philip too well to argue with him, and she saw that he looked harassed and unhappy.

"If I could only have seen Eva," she thought. She felt now that she could have spoken to Eva frankly. She had often wished since they left the Highway House that she had done so before.

But she was glad to have Philip home. They went the round of the gardens together, her hand through Philip's arm and sometimes his arm round her waist.

"Quite like old times—eh, mother?" he asked once. But he knew that he did not mean that; he knew that they could never even attempt to turn back the page. Wherever he was, and whatever he was doing now, it was of his wife that he constantly thought. Where was she? What was she doing? He wished now that he had not left her. He hated to think of her at the flat without him; hated to think that no doubt Calligan was there, too.

When they got back to the house he went to the study to write to her. He began a dozen sheets and tore them all up. He had never written her a letter in his life. How did a man begin to write to a wife who was indifferent to him? he wondered. He was sitting there biting the end of his pen when Mr. Dennison was announced.

Philip felt himself getting red.

Mr. Dennison came in smiling, with outstretched hand.

"My dear boy! Why didn't you let us know you were coming? I only heard by chance just now in the village. Someone saw you at the station this morning. Well, I am delighted to see you. And Eva! Where's my little girl?"

"She isn't here——" Philip wondered why in the world he could not speak more naturally. "Peter's up at the flat, and they wanted to do a few shows. I—er—I had to run down on business. I shall only be here a day or so. She'll come down if I stay on, of course . . . I—er—I'm sorry if you're disappointed, sir," he added lamely.

"Oh, well——" Mr. Dennison shrugged his shoulders. "If that's how it is, I suppose it's all right! Wonder you liked to be parted so soon, though—eh?" He gave a little chuckle. "Now I dare say you'd be surprised if I told you that my wife and I have never been separated for a day, wouldn't you?"

Philip cleared his throat. He could find no words.

"It's a fact, all the same," the old man went on with a sort of pride. "And not a bad thing, either . . . But there! I suppose you young people run your lives differently." He paused. He seemed struck by Philip's silence. "Everything all right—eh?" he asked with a shade of anxiety.

Philip roused himself with an effort.

"Oh—er—oh yes" he said lamely. "Of course, everything's all right."

"Good!" Mr. Dennison slapped him on the back. "You know, Philip—I've been rather worried, just now and then, you know—about—well, about my little girl. . ." He blew his nose vigorously. "I feel rather guilty about my share in—well, you know! After all, she's my only daughter, and a father naturally likes to feel that his girl is happily married. . . I should—" He hesitated. He looked at Philip with a sort of pathos in his keen eyes, "I should like to feel that—well, that you were fond of her, too, you know," he added with difficulty.

Philip almost laughed. Fond of her! That was a mild way of putting it. He looked his father-in-law steadily in the face.

"If we could have things all over again, I would choose Eva before any other woman in the world," he said with convincing sincerity.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

It was after dinner the same night that Philip told his mother the real object of his visit.

They were in the drawing-room; Mrs. Winterdick knitting as usual and Philip roaming restlessly round the room.

The piano was closed to-night; there was no one to play, and Mrs. Winterdick had just remarked how she wished Eva had been there.

"I never get any music now," she said mournfully.

Philip glanced at the piano and away again; it seemed only yesterday since he had tried to kiss his wife in this very room; his heart seemed to be stored with bitter memories like that.

He went over to where his mother sat; he spoke without looking at her.

"Do you remember asking me—once—in this very room—how—how things had turned out?" he asked jerkily.

The busy needles stopped clicking.

"Yes, Phil."

"Well, Mater, they're rotten! They're—they're a thundering sight worse than—than anything you can ever imagine. . . I—that's why I'm here. . ."

"Yes, Phil." She put one white hand on his arm with a little comforting gesture.

"It's impossible to go on living as we are," he said hoarsely. "Don't think she's to blame—she isn't! It's

all my fault—I've been a rotter to her from start to finish . . . she's too good for me—I . . . so—so I want to clear off—go abroad."

Mrs. Winterdick said nothing, but her face whitened a little.

"I've had an offer to go to Rhodesia," Philip rushed on. "It's a decent offer—good money, and all that—and I want to go. You won't stand in the way, I know, when I tell you how—how utterly impossible it is for me to—go on as I am." It's not Eva's fault—I give you my word of honour that none of it is her fault. She—she's just as wretched as I am." He tried to laugh. "We were just two blind idiots, walking into a trap, when we got married. . . . I thought it would be all right. I've known other chaps who've done it. I thought we should rub along comfortably. . . ." He drew a hard breath.

"Well, I was wrong—and—and it seems to me that the only way for both of us is for me to clear. It'll give us both a chance to—to sort ourselves out. . . ." He raised his unhappy eyes and looked at his mother. "Poor mother!" He lifted her hand to his lips. "You don't understand what it is—this sort of—hash-up, do you?"

He put her gently away and rose to his feet.

Mrs. Winterdick sat quite still, her eyes fixed on her son. He had never seemed so pathetically young to her as he did now, and it suddenly came home to her with a rush of exceeding bitterness that she was responsible for this, that it had been her hand that had built the unstable foundations of his happiness."

"If I had only known!" she told herself in anguish. "Why didn't I see what it would mean?"

Philip came back presently. He laid a hand on her shoulder.

"I don't want to hurt you," he said roughly. "You're not very sick with me, are you? It's my own fault—nobody else's. If I clear off for a bit. . . . Eva could come here, so that you won't be left alone. She's never had a proper chance with you. You've never known her as I should like you to—" He broke off with a hopeless gesture.

"Anyway, you must arrange about that. I should like to know you were here together—you two . . ." He met his mother's eye pleadingly. "Now you know it all," he added.

Mrs. Winterdick rose; she put her hands on his shoulders and looked into his face with loving anxiety.

"Do I, Phil?" she asked. Are you sure—quite sure . . . ?"

He stammered out that there was nothing more to tell her, that if there had been . . . He broke off.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

There was a little silence, then she said very gently:

"You didn't love Eva when you married her, Phil?"

"No—I . . ." Their eyes met, and suddenly Philip broke out in an anguish. "She doesn't care for me—I'd give any mortal thing . . . I'd give anything in the world . . . but it's no good . . . no good . . ."

He pulled himself together almost at once, and tried to laugh.

"Well, that's the worst," he said with an effort. "It's a just punishment anyway. She can't stand me—shows her good taste, I suppose."

He fumbled for his cigarettes and lit one; he was horribly ashamed of his momentary breakdown; he could not look at his mother.

"So it's all settled—eh?" he said presently. "I go to Rhodesia and Eva comes here—if you'll have her . . . and Mater . . ."

"Yes, Phil."

"You won't . . . you're not blaming her? You wouldn't, if you knew—everything!"

Mrs. Winterdick raised her sad eyes.

"I never have blamed her, Phil," she said gently.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

THE days following her husband's departure from the flat seemed to Eva when she looked back on them, like some feverish dream. After the first expostulation Peter left her severely alone; he was kind and attentive to her when he had time to spare from dancing attendance upon Kitty, but she felt that she was losing him. The change was in herself she knew, and not in Peter, but she was powerless to help it; circumstance had seized her in a relentless grip and was whirling her madly on through the days till she lost her breath and had to let herself drift.

Calligan was always at the flat; he went about with her everywhere.

He had never alluded to their compact; he never spoke of Philip; but he was there whenever she wanted him; she had an hysterical feeling that he was the one solid thing in a world of crumbling disillusionment.

"You're my sheet anchor, you know," she said to him recklessly one night. "If it hadn't been for you I should have beaten myself to pieces on the rocks long ago."

Philip had never written to her, and after three anguished days of watching for the letter he had promised she had given up hope.

He did not mean to write; she believed that he did not ever mean to come back.

She was too proud to attempt to find out what he was doing, or if he was still at Apsley.

Once she woke up in the night crying and sobbing and trembling in every limb because she dreamt that he had gone to Rhodesia without saying good-bye.

What were people at Apsley thinking, she wondered? What was Philip's mother thinking? And her own mother?

Somehow it seemed to matter very little; she had lost Philip, and the rest might go, and welcome.

She was afraid to let herself think what this really meant to her; she filled every moment of her days so that she was never left alone, so that she never had time to give way to despair.

She went to more theatres in a week than she had ever been to in all her life before; she hardly ever dined at the flat—she welcomed Kitty's overtures of companionship, and even sought them; she knew that Kitty only cared to be with her because she liked being taken to expensive restaurants and out in the car. She had bought Kitty several presents—she was beginning to spend her money recklessly.

"How much do you think I've spent since I came to London?" she asked Peter one day.

He shook his head, his mouth looked grim.

"Goodness knows! You must have got through a lot. That brooch you gave Kitty cost a good deal, I know." He looked at his sister curiously. "Do you like Kitty?" he asked.

"She amuses me—and I like being amused. I hate being alone."

She dreaded the nights. She would never go to bed till long after midnight.

"I'm not tired," she would declare even when she was dropping with fatigue. "I couldn't sleep a wink if I went to bed."

She invited people to the flat night after night. Kitty had heaps of friends, and she liked to have them entertained for her.

Calligan alone understood her in these days; knew that she had been caught up in a sort of dance of death; knew that beneath her laughter and merriment her heart was breaking, and his own heart seemed breaking for her.

A hundred times he had been tempted to send for Philip. He hated lending himself even to an apparent share in this farce. He felt that he could strike Peter whenever he met the boy's condemning eyes and heard the chilliness in his voice.

He knew what Peter thought—he knew what Kitty thought, and he knew that he had been a fool to allow Eva to do this thing. It was madness, sheer madness, so his common sense would tell him when he was away from her. Every night he swore that he would go to the flat no more, and every morning his determination weakened and he went as usual.

One night when he and Eva were having dinner at a restaurant a man at the next table looked across at them and nodded to Calligan.

"Who is he?" Eva asked. Her head was splitting. She was feeling worn out. Only that night as she dressed to come out she had realised how white and haggard she was looking.

For the first time in her life she had rouged her cheeks. She felt that she could not bear anyone to see that she looked as wan and unhappy as she knew she did.

Peter's sharp eyes had been quick to see the make-up. He accused her angrily.

"Eva!—you've been rouging!"

She laughed defiantly.

"Well, what if I have? Kitty does."

Peter had said no more, but somehow it had seemed to matter less at that moment what Kitty did than what his sister did.

The man who had nodded to Calligan was looking hard at Eva as she asked her question, and she repeated it:—

"Tell me who he is?"

"It's a man named Faulkner," Calligan said reluctantly. "He is a friend of Philip's."

"Faulkner!" She echoed the name breathlessly.

"That's the man who is sending him to Rhodesia . . ." Her eyes blazed with excitement. "Bring him over here—I should like to know him. Please bring him over here!"

Calligan obeyed reluctantly. He knew what she wanted with Faulkner, and his heart ached for her.

"I know your husband very well," Faulkner said as he was introduced. He was a handsome, middle-aged man with kind eyes; "but I don't think I have ever had the pleasure of meeting you since your wedding. Do you remember me?"

Eva shook her head. "I have heard Philip speak of

you, of course. He has told me all about Rhodesia. I hope it is satisfactorily settled."

"I am glad to say it is." Faulkner was watching her interestedly. He thought she was a very charming-looking woman. He was trying to remember who had told him the Winterdicks were unhappily married.

"I saw Philip this morning," he went on; "but, of course, you know, he said he had been staying down in the country. He ran up to settle a few business matters with me."

"Yes—oh, yes!" Calligan, looking at Eva, marvelled at the composure of her voice. His own blood felt on fire for her. Philip had been to London, and he had not been to the flat. It was monstrous—preposterous!

"And when is it settled that he leaves England?" She was asking casually; one would have thought it a matter of complete indifference to her.

Faulkner knocked the ash from his cigar into a tray.

"He sails on the twenty-second," he said innocently. "That is—let me see—a fortnight to-day."

It seemed to Eva that for a moment the whole world stood still. The crowded, brilliantly-lit restaurant seemed to recede to a great distance, and then come swelling back to her with nightmare swiftness. She was conscious of a terrible numbness, and from the whiteness of her face her blue eyes sought Calligan's piteously.

There was only one way in which to help her; by attracting Faulkner's attention from her agitation, and Calligan threw himself gallantly into the effort.

To give her time—just a moment in which to recover herself. When he looked at her again the dreadful pallor had left her face, she even managed a smile.

"I am glad it's all settled," she said bravely. "Philip has wanted something to occupy his time for ever so long. And he was always keen on going abroad, wasn't he, Mr. Calligan?"

"Yes—yes, I believe he was."

Calligan changed the subject skilfully. They talked on ordinary matters till Faulkner rose.

"You must come and see us at the flat," Eva told him, as they shook hands. "I can't promise that Philip will be there, but I shall be delighted to see you."

It was only when Faulkner had gone that she turned to Calligan with sudden weakness.

"Oh, do you think we might go home?"

"We will go at once."

He found a taxicab and put her into it.



"Would you rather go alone?" he asked. He was dreading being left with her, but Eva insisted.

"Come with me—of course! Why ever not?"

There was a little excited note in her voice. She talked away the whole time, covering Calligan's silence. She never spoke of her husband, and it was only just as they were nearing the flat that Calligan said desperately:

"What are we going to do? What can we do?"

She wilfully misunderstood him.

"What are we going to do? Why, go home and have a smoke and some coffee, of course! What else can we do?"

He took her hand in a hard grip.

"Don't play with me, Eva. Don't pretend that you don't understand . . . somehow I can't stand it to-night. You know what I mean, Philip is going away in a fortnight, and if you expect me to stand by and let him go without an effort to prevent it I tell you that I can't. I tell you that it's a physical impossibility.

She looked away from him out into the dark street; then she said, in a voice so hard and strange that he hardly recognised it.

"Let him go. Why should we try to prevent him if he wants to go?"

"It's your whole life's happiness. You can't throw it away for what may be just a misunderstanding. Philip's a good fellow. I've known him longer than you have, and I beg of you—for your own sake . . ."

She dragged her hand away.

"It's no good. I've done everything I can. I can't be hurt and humiliated any more. Oh, it's all very fine for you to talk! You don't know what it's all been. You heard what Mr. Faulkner said—that Philip is in town. He hasn't troubled to come and see me—he won't trouble. . . . It's finished and done with, and perhaps when he has really gone I shall be able to begin to forget him." She drew a long breath. "I mean to try—I must try."

"Let me speak to him. We've been friends for years. Let me say something to try and put matters right—I implore you!"

She turned her eyes to his pleading face.

"You would only add to my humiliation. No, no—there's no chance that it is just a misunderstanding . . . We've just got to let things go. We can't stop them—it's too late."

"Philip may have heard that we have been seen about together a great deal; he may be jealous."

She laughed at that.

"That was my hope—but it's dead, now—quite dead! I don't believe it ever really existed."

Calligan leaned his head in his hands.

"There must be some explanation," he insisted doggedly. "It's impossible that things can be allowed to end like this—you've only been married such a little while. I—I'd do anything in the world to see you happy."

"I know you would." Her voice softened. She slipped her hand into his with a little confiding gesture. "You've been—oh, such a dear to me! I don't know what I should have done without you! And it can't have been much fun for you—taking me about day after day."

"I've never been so happy in my life," Calligan said hoarsely. The words seemed forced from him. "There is only one thing that could make me happier—and that is to see you and Philip—"

She broke in with a little high-pitched laugh.

"You'll never see that! There's only a fortnight left, and miracles don't happen nowadays." She brushed the tears from her eyes. "Don't desert me, Tom—you've stood by so faithfully."

She had never called him by his Christian name before, and the blood rushed to his face at the unexpectedness of it.

"You and I have done the wrong thing," he said presently. "At least I was wrong in consenting to—what I did. This sort of thing never does any good. You'll only get talked about and—"

"Do you think I care?"

He shook his head.

"No—not now, perhaps; but I do . . . Eva—go down home—I know it sounds brutal to say that to you . . . but sometimes one has to be cruel to be kind. You say there's only a fortnight left—well—don't spend it in a way for which you may be sorry all your life. Go back to him."

"It's only of Philip you think," she said stormily. "You don't care how often I am hurt and humiliated . . ."

"It is only of you I think," he insisted gently. "And that's why I say this must stop—this . . . this make-believe of you and I going about together . . ."

"You mean you're going to desert me?" she asked in sudden terror. "Oh, don't do that. I've nobody but you—if you throw me over, too . . ."

She was sobbing. In her overwrought state it seemed the last straw that perhaps she was to lose this man as well. Calligan looked away from her. Her sobbing wrung

his heart, but he knew he was doing the right thing now if he had never done it before.

"I shall always be your friend," he told her with an effort. "But there are some things in which not even a friend can help you. Go down to Apsley, my dear—don't let him put you in the wrong; don't give him an excuse to blame you—any more."

"You mean that he will blame me—for these last ten days!" She laughed. "I don't care if he does—I don't care what he says or thinks—"

There was a little silence, then Calligan said sadly:

"The mere fact of your saying that disproves your words, dear."

She leaned back, her hands clasped in her lap.

"I'm going to tell you something now," she said, and her voice was suddenly quiet. "I'm going to tell you—the whole truth!" She waited a moment, but he did not speak. "I can trust you, I know, trust you never to tell anyone. I shouldn't be telling you, only—if I don't you'll go away and leave me too, as—as Philip has—and I couldn't bear it. . . . Well—well . . . Philip married me because his father had lost all his money, and they were on the verge of ruin; he married me for my money—to save his father. I didn't know at the time—he didn't tell me." Her voice was dully monotonous as if she was past feeling or caring. "I found out—on my wedding day," she went on slowly. "Just—just after we—came back—from church."

She looked at Calligan, but he sat motionless, and she went on:

"I nearly went mad—at first, but afterwards . . ." She made a passionate gesture. "Oh, can't you see now that there's no hope! No hope at all! It isn't Philip's fault; he can't make himself care for me. He married me to save his father—"

She laughed. "We need not have been in such a hurry, need we? Mr. Winterdick only lived three days after the wedding."

She drew a long breath.

"So now—now I've told you everything, you won't ask me to give him any more chances, will you? It's—it's just as embarrassing for him when I try to be nice to him, as it's—it's painful to me . . . He's done his best—the first day he really did his best. He said that he loved me—he begged me to believe it—and for a moment . . . well, just for a moment I almost did . . . I'm so glad that I didn't quite give way—after all . . ."

She stopped, but Calligan did not speak, and presently she touched his arm gently.

"Well?" she asked. "You're not going to tell me to go down to Apsley now, are you?"

He roused himself with an effort.

"I am—more than ever," he said firmly. "You must go! It's the only way left—can't you see it?"

"I can't see anything except that Philip doesn't want me, and that he wants to get away from me." She broke down into bitter weeping. "Oh, there isn't anybody in all the world who cares for me," she said sobbing.

Calligan did not move; his hands were clenched and he had almost bitten his lip through to try and control himself.

Presently, when she was quieter, he said evenly:—

"You mustn't talk like that. Things are never so bad for any of us, but that they might be worse. Come now"—he took her hand and patted it comfortingly—"promise me that you will go down to Apsley to-morrow."

"I can't leave Peter."

"Peter can go with you, or stay here and look after himself."

"I don't want to go."

"We never want to do what is our duty. I'm not trying to preach to you, God knows, but—it's for—for both our sakes."

Something in his voice arrested her attention. She looked at him quickly. It was too dark in the cab to see his face at all clearly, but they were just passing a street lamp, and its yellow light shone in through the window, and for a second she had a glimpse of Calligan's face—white and strained, with hopeless eyes.

She knew then that Peter had been right when he said that this man loved her, and she realised, too, with overwhelming shock the appalling selfishness of which she had been guilty. She had been willing to sacrifice him for her own desires; she had never given a serious thought to him, or what he might suffer as a consequence.

Her fingers tightened for a moment round his, then she drew them gently away.

He was asking a great deal of her—to go to Apsley, to play the dutiful wife—to throw dust in the eyes of a world that was already wondering; to keep up the farcical pretence until Philip had really gone.

But she owed Calligan something; she was beginning dimly to realise now how much she owed him, and after all—a fortnight was such a little time!

Twice she tried to speak, but could find no words, then at last she said almost in a whisper—

"Very well—if if I go, will you—will you promise me something?"

"Yes."

"That if—if I want you—if I—if I can't go on with it, if I have to send for you—or—or come back—you won't send me back to him again—will you promise me that?"

"On my word of honour."

She drew back a little.

"Very well, then, I will go."

"Thank you, dear."

They had reached the flat, and Calligan opened the door and got out; he avoided looking at Eva.

The taxicab had rolled away into the darkness before he spoke.

"Good night—and God bless you."

She tried to answer him, but could find no words, and the next moment he was walking away down the street.

## CHAPTER XL

Eva locked the front door and put up the chain. She was turning away to her own room when Peter came into the hall. He looked at her very oddly she thought. When he spoke his voice was abrupt and unfriendly.

"Philip has been here," he said.

"Philip!" She stood quite still staring at her brother.

"Yes. There's a note for you in your room." He waited a moment, then "Good-night," he said brusquely.

He made no attempt to kiss her. He walked away to his own room and shut the door.

Eva stood for a moment where he had left her. She felt a little dazed. So Philip had come to the flat after all—and had found her out with Calligan!

Her lips twisted into a wry smile. Well, what did it matter? She put out the light and felt her way to her room, in darkness. The first thing she saw was her husband's note propped up against a bowl of roses which Calligan had sent to her only that morning. There was a sort of irony in the fact. She wondered if Philip had guessed from whom the flowers had come. Anyway it did not matter—nothing seemed to matter.

She went over and took the note up. It was not sealed, not even enclosed in an envelope. She wondered if Manders had had sufficient curiosity to read it.

She unfolded the paper and looked at her husband's writing. It came over her with a sort of shock that this

was the first time he had ever written to her, and incongruously, she remembered the note she had written to him that last night at Highway House.

Philip had written in pencil—it made his big, sprawly writing look particularly schoolboyish, and for an instant her heart contracted. There is something so motherly in the love that all good women bear to a man, something that—if appealed to—never fails to respond with a thrill of tenderness, something which even now for a moment brought the tears to Eva's eyes.

She brushed them angrily away. She had done with such weakness. Nothing mattered any more. She would not allow anything to hurt her again as she had been hurt day after day since her marriage.

There was no beginning to Philip's note, and it was not possible to guess from its hurried scrawl that he had written and rewritten it a dozen times.

"I leave England in a fortnight. I am sorry to have to ask anything of you, but it would be kind, for my mother's sake, if you will come down to Apsley until I go. I am staying to-night in town, and will call round in the morning. There is a train down at eleven. As far as I am concerned you will be as free at the Highway House as you have been during the last ten days.—PHILIP WINTERDICK.

Eva laughed. She had laughed before she was aware of it, and she looked round the silent room with frightened eyes, almost as if she suspected that the discordant laughter had not been her own.

She tore the note into tiny pieces and threw them into the grate. As free down there as she had been here! He had been thinking of Calligan when he wrote that, she supposed.

She began to undress. She felt curiously detached and uninterested. She wondered where Philip was, and if Faulkner had known all along that, though her husband was staying in London, she had not seen him.

She left her pretty frock lying on the floor where it had fallen from her shoulders and crept into bed. She lay awake, staring into the darkness. Did she mean to go? She hardly knew. She felt as if she stood between two forces—one commanding and the other propelling, between Philip, in whose brief words she had read a command, and Calligan, who had pleaded with her and made her promise.

Did she mean to go? She moistened her dry lips. "If I do, it will be only because I promised you," she said aloud, as if in answer to some spoken question. It was for

Calligan's sake that she would go, if she went; not for her husband's.

How she had changed! Once she would have followed Philip to the ends of the earth and thought it happiness; now it would be not for his sake at all if she went down to Highway House to spend his last few days in England.

At breakfast next morning Peter was silent. Eva wondered what had happened; if Philip had said anything, or if Peter had!

Presently she asked:—

"Did you have a row with Philip last night?"

The cold tone of her voice surprised her. She tried to shake herself rid of the feeling that it was not she at all who spoke. What was the matter with her? she wondered helplessly.

Peter raised his eyes and dropped them immediately.

"No. He asked where you were, that is all."

"And what did you say?"

"I said I didn't know."

"But you did know," she answered.

Peter did not reply. "Didn't you?" she insisted.

He looked up.

"It's not likely I was going to tell him—I am too—ashamed of you for that," he said bitterly.

"Ashamed!" The blood flew to her face. "How dare you—Peter . . ." His name was a cry, but she checked it. After all, what did it matter? What was the use of explanations? Besides, there was nothing to explain; he would not understand.

She left him to finish his breakfast and went to her room, where Manders was packing her clothes.

She put on her hat and sat down to wait for Philip; while she was waiting the telephone went; she called to Peter to answer it—she heard his voice in the hall, and knew that it must be Philip who had rung up, but she did not even try to listen; it was of no interest to her what they said, or what arrangements they made for her disposal. Her heart and soul felt dead—she was just a mechanical body that could still move and speak, and count the days automatically that must pass before the fortnight ended.

Presently Peter came to the door.

"Philip has had to go down by an earlier train—he says that he will send the car to meet you at Apsley, if you will catch the eleven o'clock."

So she had counted on her coming; counted on her obedience to that curt note.

"Very well."

Peter went away, and she heard him<sup>3</sup> speaking again at the 'phone.

He went with her to the station; he hardly spoke at all, but once or twice she knew that he looked at her distressfully.

"I am bringing Kitty home on Saturday," he said. "I shall see you then. May I stay at the flat till Saturday?"

"Of course."

There was only a moment before the train went; she wondered what she could say to him; she wished he would go; it was uphill work to-day to talk to Peter.

The guard's whistle had just sounded when suddenly Peter caught her hand<sup>2</sup>—

"Kiss me, Bonnie!" It was a long time since he had called her by her old pet name, and for a moment her face worked as if she were going to cry, only she knew there were no tears to come.

She kissed him apathetically.

"Why are you ashamed of me?" she asked dully.

But there was no time for him to answer; the train had started.

She sat in the corner, hardly moving till she reached Apsley. Would Philip be at the station to meet her? It seemed improbable; she did not even trouble to look for him as she left the platform.

• But he was there, at the wheel of the little two-seater looking towards her.

His eyes, hard and accusing, met hers, and she felt an insane desire to laugh.

She had actually thought she could make this man jealous—this cold, indifferent man who was her husband!

"You were very sure I should come," she said.

There was no attempt at any other greeting. She got in beside him and he started away.

It was the same car in which he had driven her the night of the dinner party, the night when she had kissed him—the night she had had her one golden hour.

The words of the song slipped again into her memory—

"Though all the skies are clouded,  
Though all the porten's<sup>1</sup>lour,  
Somewhere, to someone, this is the golden hour."

Unconsciously she found herself saying them aloud. Philip stared at her.

"What did you say?" he asked.

She started violently.

"I didn't say anything—I was just thinking."

"Thinking aloud?" he asked cynically.



She did not answer. He kept his eyes fixed on her. Suddenly: "What's the matter?" he asked, abruptly. "Are you ill?"

Her eyes had closed, and she swayed a little.

She forced herself to look at him; she had the feeling of having been roughly roused from sleep.

"No—I'm quite well. Tired, that's all."

"Too many late nights," he said, unemotionally.

They went some way in silence.

"I suppose I ought to tell you," Philip said then, "that people have been talking down here—about us! Otherwise I should not have asked you to come until I had gone. But my mother—"

She broke in wildly.

"You need not blame your mother—I don't imagine it's her fault that you married me."

Philip bit his lip.

"Very well—we won't argue about it. I shall be gone in a fortnight, and then, of course, you will be free to do as you like."

"Thank you." It was difficult to keep her thoughts from wandering; sometimes his voice seemed such a long way off, and then suddenly it would almost seem as if he were shouting in her ear.

All feeling was numbed, but there was just the faintest resentment in her heart still against someone—she wondered who it could be. She knit her brows, trying to keep her thoughts concentrated.

Ah, yes, of course! It was Tom Calligan with whom she felt resentful. It was he who had pushed her into this fresh hell of suffering; his hands that were forcing her to sit there beside Philip; her promise to him that had brought her to Apsley. She would write and ask him to let her off that promise—she could not go on suffering any more.

The car turned in at the drive and stopped at the door of the Highway House. She moved her cramped limbs and got out; she went on into the hall without waiting for Philip. There was a wood fire burning in the grate; she looked at it and her thoughts carried her back to the last night she had stayed here, when she had stolen downstairs to leave her note for Philip; she turned and looked at him as he followed her.

"I suppose you burnt my note that night?" she said.

"Burnt your note? What note?"

She laughed as she met his eyes.

"Oh, only one of the many love-letters I have written you," she said with sarcasm.

He passed her without a word and went on to the library.

She stood looking after him.

"It was I who said that," she was telling herself in a sort of blind terror. "It was my voice—that awful, sarcastic voice. Oh, what will become of me—what will become of me."

She followed Philip into the library. He just glanced at her.

"Hadn't you better go and take your hat off? Lunch will be ready—"

"Yes." But she sat down at the writing table.

Philip watched her uneasily. He could not analyse his own feelings towards his wife except that through all the jealousy and bitterness and suffering there was a great pity for her, for her youth and her broken happiness.

Some minutes passed before he spoke.

"Who are you writing to?" he asked.

She started, dropping the pen she had taken up. She put her hand to her head in a confused sort of way. She laughed stupidly.

"Oh, nobody—nobody. . . ." She tore the paper into pieces and threw them into the waste paper basket.

There was a moment of silence, then she got up and walked out of the room. Philip waited till he heard her go upstairs, then he took the torn papers from the waste-paper basket and pieced them together with infinite difficulty. Presently he had all the words spread on the blotter before him.

"It's your fault I have come . . . because I promised you I would; but let me off, Tom. I am suffering, suffering. There seems nothing left in all the world any more but just pain. . . ."

Philip's face whitened as he stared at the incoherent message. There was an envelope lying face downwards close by. He turned it over and it was addressed to Calligan.

## CHAPTER XLI

UPSTAIRS Eva had taken off her hat and was standing listlessly in the centre of the room. Her head was burning hot and her temples throbbed cruelly.

"I can't be ill, there isn't time," she was telling herself determinedly. "Only a fortnight—there isn't time."

She poured out some water and laved her face; when the gong sounded for lunch she went out on to the landing and met Mrs. Winterdick.

"I am very pleased to see you, my dear," the elder woman said. She held out her hand, and Eva submitted to be kissed.

"I wonder if she is ashamed of me, too, as Peter is!" she thought.

They went downstairs together; Eva's chair had been put beside Philip's, but she asked the maid who waited at table to move it to the other side. She made the excuse that she liked to see out of the window.

She exerted herself to talk; she tried to remember what she had been doing in London since Philip left her, but, looking back it seemed like some delirium which she only wished to forget. All her days had been passed with Calligan, and it was difficult to speak without mentioning his name. But he was in her thoughts all the time against a background of curious resentment because it had been he who had forced this upon her. She had not wished to come; the first sight of Philip had destroyed all her hard-won indifference and torn the wound open afresh.

As soon as lunch was finished she slipped away; when the door had closed Mrs. Winterdick said anxiously.

"She looks very ill, don't you think, Phil!"

His face twitched.

"Does she?"

He knew that his mother was right; it had given him a shock to see the alteration which a fortnight had made in his wife. Her face had grown thin, and her pretty features had sharpened; there were hollows beneath her eyes, too, as if she had not slept.

Was it because she was fretting about Calligan or that other man? he wondered. Since he had read that incoherent message on the torn paper he was almost sure that it must be Calligan for whom she really cared.

What had she meant by saying that there seemed nothing left in all the world but pain?

One or two men whom he had run up against in town yesterday had dropped him a well-meant hint or two. Apparently Eva had spent all her time in Calligan's company making no attempt to disguise the fact; she had been seen everywhere with him.

"Too many late nights, I expect, mother," Philip forced himself to say. "The country will soon pull her round again."

He went out into the hall and met Eva coming down stairs; she was dressed for walking.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"Only home—I want to see them all."

"I told your father you were coming to-day."

She looked at him quickly.

"You were very sure that I should do as I was told."

"I did not tell you—I only asked."

She did not contradict him; Philip took his hat.

"I will come with you."

She laughed.

"We are to make a good beginning, is that it? We are to let everyone see that we do sometimes go out together."

She felt better when she had left the house. The throbbing nerves in her temple quieted a little, and the cool autumn air soothed her.

It seemed strange to be walking with Philip; the last two weeks had seemed like years of separation; once she found herself thinking how very little he had changed, then she laughed, realising the foolishness of the thought—of course, one did not change in a few days.

"We met Mr. Faulkner at dinner last night," she said suddenly.

"I didn't remember him, but he remembered me. Mr. Calligan introduced us all over again."

"Yes."

"He told me it was all fixed up about Rhodesia, so I knew before I got your note."

"Yes."

"I hope you will like it," said Eva; she felt that she must go on talking, anything was better than silence.

"I hope I shall," Philip agreed.

Silence again; it seemed impossible to avoid it; she tried to think of something else to say, but there seemed no other subject in all the world but Rhodesia, and the fact that a fortnight held but fourteen days.

"Does father know that you are going away?" she asked.

"I have not told him yet. We will tell him to-day, if you like."

"It doesn't make any difference; poor father! He will be upset, won't he?"

"Why should he be?"

"Well, he thought he had settled us both so comfortably in life. He hates to find that anything he has arranged has gone wrong."

"It cannot matter to him," Philip said, indifferently, but he was secretly relieved to find that his father-in-law was not at home.

There was nobody at home except the servants. Mr. and Mrs. Dennison had gone out driving, and the boys could not be found.

Eva was disappointed.

She told the maid that she would come over again that evening, "perhaps to dinner," she added.

Philip was frowning as they walked away.

"You can't go to dinner," he said, as soon as they were out of earshot. "What do you suppose my mother will think—your first night here?"

"I don't suppose she'll think any worse of me than she does already," she answered, recklessly. "Why, even Peter told me this morning that he was ashamed of me." Her voice broke a little.

"Peter!" Young Winterdick flushed crimson. "Young puppy! What the devil . . ."

Eva laughed extravagantly.

"Oh, Peter was sticking up for you; you need not look so angry. He seemed sorry for you, I think—sorry that you had got such a wife as me. . . ." She stood still suddenly. "Oh, I'm so tired," she added, piteously.

"Tired!" Philip looked at her sharply.

"What have you been doing with yourself?" he asked angrily. He tried to take her arm to steady her, but she would not let him; she began to walk on again.

"I'm all right now—it's just . . . I suppose I'm not used to walking. We always had a taxi everywhere in London."

Philip smiled grimly.

"I never knew Calligan had so much money to chuck away," he said brutally.

\* \* \* \* \*

Philip was changing for dinner that evening when a maid came to the door.

"If you please, sir, Mr. Dennison wishes to speak to you."

"Mr. Dennison—oh . . . well—just tell my wife, will you?" He opened the door and stood there, one arm in his coat.

"I'll be down in a minute—just tell . . ." The girl interrupted:

"If you please, sir, Mr. Dennison said that it was you he wished to speak to, and very particularly."

Philip stared.

"Oh, very well." He put the other arm in, gave his tie a twitch and went slowly downstairs.

Something was the matter, of course! Probably the old man had already heard about Rhodesia. Philip looked a trifle nervous as he walked into the library.

Mr. Dennison was standing back to the fire; he had not taken off his overcoat, and he held his hat in his hand; there was an air of antagonism about him which Philip

recognised at once, for he just said "Good evening" and waited.

Mr. Dennison cleared his throat; the fact that his son-in-law was in evening dress made him feel at a disadvantage. He wished he, too, had the protection of a white shirt front. He was a man who was always greatly influenced and impressed by externals.

Philip shut the door and came forward.

"Anything wrong? Won't you take off your coat? You'll find the room rather warm. Eva will be down in a minute."

"I haven't come to see my daughter, but you," said Mr. Dennison, bluntly.

"Yes." Philip waited. "I hope nothing is the matter," he ventured, after a moment.

"I hope so, too." Mr. Dennison twisted his hat and coughed. "I hope so, too, Philip. But I've heard a most extraordinary thing this afternoon—about you! Of course, it may be absurd, but, on the other hand, it may not." He twisted his hat again, put it down on the table and for a moment stared at it as if he had never seen it before; then he said, with a sort of burst:—

"What's all this tommy rot about you going to Rhodesia."

Philip sat down on the edge of the table, hands thrust into his jacket pockets.

"It isn't rot," he said, rather shortly. "It's the truth I am sailing in a fortnight." He raised his eyes. "We were coming over to tell you this evening, sir."

Mr. Dennison lost his temper.

"Don't 'sir' me!" he said, with a roar. "I've come here to talk to you as man to man, and I'm going to say what I think before I go. But, first, perhaps you'll tell me what you propose to do with my daughter."

"She is not coming with me, if you mean that," Philip said. "For one thing, I did not ask her to do so, because I knew beforehand that she would refuse."

He looked the elder man straight in the eyes.

"You know as well as I do that this marriage, we arranged so cleverly has turned out the failure it deserved to be," he said quietly. "I am not altogether to blame, except for having been hound enough to lend myself to the scheme which you and my father——"

Mr. Dennison interrupted furiously:

"You were glad enough to 'lend' yourself to it, as you call it. Glad enough to keep a roof over your head at my expense—glad enough to marry my girl to save your own skin. And now you've got all you want out of the deal you threw her over, you clear off and leave her to face

what will be said as best she can. But it won't do, Mr. Philip Winterdick—it won't do!" Mr. Dennison always lost himself when he lost his temper. The self-made man showed unpleasantly through the carefully cultivated veneer of gentility. He took out his handkerchief now and mopped his crimson face. "You've got me to deal with, you know!" he said loudly. "It's not many weeks since I saved you and your family, remember—saved you easily, too, thanks to the money I've made with honest work—and, by God, if you leave my girl, as you seem to have made up your mind to leave her, I'll break you—I'll break you if I have to break myself as well! I——" He stopped, breathing hard. In their mutual excitement neither of the men had noticed the opening of the door or seen that Eva had been standing there for some moments listening.

Mr. Dennison made a valiant effort to recover himself. He tried to smile.

"Come in, my dear—come in. I'm just having a little chat with Philip. I . . ."

She came forward.

"I'm afraid I've been listening," she said composedly, though there was a hectic flush on her face and her eyes looked feverish. "And, father—you're quite wrong if you—if you think that Philip is leaving me. It is my wish, too. We—we both think it is the best thing—that we should both be free—quite free—for the present, at least. . . ." She turned to her husband. "That is so, isn't it?" she asked, raising her voice a little. "Tell father that it is the wish of us both that you should go."

The moments had been terrible to her while she stood there in the doorway. She had had no intention of eavesdropping. She had known that her father was there and had come in quite naturally to see him, and then . . . she felt that what was left of her pride had been dragged in the mire while she listened to his blustering words. He had come to bully Philip into staying with her; to dare him to go!

Would Philip have consented? She rejoiced that he had not had the chance—that she had come in time to spare herself this last humiliation.

Philip had turned away without answering. The whole scene was a nightmare to him. His father-in-law's coarse, blustering anger, Eva's intervention and the strained, sick look on her flushed face.

He had never been a very discerning man. He was content, as a rule, to take things at their face value; if anyone said a thing, he believed it. He did not know enough about women to know also that, when a woman is

lying, she often appears to be the most truthful.

Eva had said that it had been her wish that he should go to Rhodesia! Very well. He believed it and accepted her words as a final dismissal. He walked over to the fireplace, keeping his back turned to his father-in-law.

Mr. Dennison spoke to him sharply:

"You hear what my daughter says! Is this the truth?"

"Yea." Mr. Dennison was nonplussed. He had not expected so tame an acquiescence.

"Humph! Well, I call it disgraceful! Abominable! I've never had a smirch on my name till now. I've always walked upright, and kept my name clean." His face grew apoplectic once more. "And to think that I ever thought it an honour for my daughter to marry a Winter-dick!" he broke out in sudden passion.

"Father!"

Mr. Dennison shook his daughter's hand away. "I'm not talking to you, my girl, but to Philip here. I've kept my share of the bargain like an honourable man, which is more than he has done, or is likely to do from what I can see of it."

Philip swung round; his eyes blazed in his white face.

"You shall apologise for that!" he said hoarsely.

"Apologise, I say, or——"

"Philip!" Eva was between the two men. "Philip! Your mother will hear—and the servants! Everyone! Oh, father, please, please go away and leave us alone."

Mr. Dennison looked at his daughter.

"That's right! Turn your father out of the house now there's nothing more to be got out of him," he said in an injured voice. "I can go now I'm no more use." He picked up his hat and strode to the door. "It's the last time I shall trouble either of you," he said melodramatically as he opened it.

Eva had sunk down into a chair, her hands clasped in her lap. Every now and then a great shudder shook her from head to foot.

She wondered dully what Philip would say; if he at all realised what it had cost her to so defend him, if he would be at all grateful to her, or sorry for her.

She was past hoping for a kind word from him, but there was still a sort of faint curiosity in her mind as to what attitude he would take now.

Then all at once he spoke, without looking at her, without even seeming to address her.

"And so the way is very nicely cleared—for Calligsa," he laughed discordantly. "Well, I suppose I have no complaint." He looked down at her consideringly. "How do you propose to work it?" he asked. "Have you



got that mapped out, too! I've often wondered how these things are managed. Are you going to wait till I've gone and then sue for desertion? Is that it? I promise not to put in a defence."

His voice quivered with passion. "Why don't you answer? Why don't you say something?"

"There's nothing to say." Her white lips just formed the words; she was wondering how much longer it would be before the thread of her endurance snapped; this last insult, so undeserved, so unexpected, had struck her to the soul.

"Nothing to say!" he echoed with a sneer. "Nothing to say to me, you mean! You had plenty to say to Calligan, I'll be bound, when I was safely out of the way. To think that I was ever fool enough to trust either of you . . . and your father dares to insult me and say that it is I who have not kept my share of the bargain! I!—I!" He struck himself on his broad chest in fury. "Let him say it to you! Tell him the truth, and let him say it to you! Tell him that you've never been my wife, that you've only lied to me, and fooled me, and made me a laughing stock! That you've driven me out of England so that you and Calligan. . . ." His passion fell as suddenly as it had risen; he turned away with a smothered groan.

"Philip——" It was Mrs. Winterdick's voice in the hall.

Philip looked at his wife; there was utter despair in his face, but she did not raise her eyes; she just sat there silent and cold—cold as a stone.

For a moment he hesitated, struggling hard for composure, then he opened the door and went out.

A servant was just sounding the gong for dinner. Eva rose mechanically. Another interminable meal! And she had got to sit through it without breaking down, without letting anyone see what she suffered. She felt as if she were running a race against time and the duration of that fast-snapping thread of endurance.

"But it's the last—the last meal I shall ever have here," she told herself. "I ought never to have come—I knew I ought not to have come, but he made me."

She kept the thought of Calligan steadily before her; he would not fail her—she could trust him; in this desperate moment he seemed to be her only friend; her father was angry with her, Peter had cast her off, and there was nobody else to whom she could turn; Mrs. Dennison had never counted for much in the lives of any of her children; none of them would ever have thought of going to her for sympathy or advice.

But Calligan had promised that if ever she wanted him

he would not fail her, and she wanted him now—wanted, not so much the man himself as his kindness, his cheeriness and sympathetic affection.

She never knew how she sat through dinner; she could never remember a word of what was said, or anything that happened, but at last Mrs. Winterdick rose from the table, and it was at an end.

But even now Philip's mother detained her for a moment; there was a world of kindness in the eyes that were so like his.

"I am afraid you are not well, my dear," she said gently. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Thank you, but I am quite well." Eva's voice sounded cold and unfriendly; she had to speak like that to keep herself from breaking down.

Mrs. Winterdick sighed and went on to the drawing-room; she wanted to help the girl; any slight resentment she had felt against her hitherto had melted away during that interminable dinner.

The brave efforts Eva had made to enter into the conversation had been more pathetic to the elder woman than any silence could have been; the hard brilliancy of her eyes, more eloquent than a storm of tears.

"And it is all my fault, all my fault," Mrs. Winterdick told herself in a passion of remorse. "They are both miserable, and through me."

She hoped that Philip would follow her to the drawing-room, but he did not; the house seemed horribly silent, as if disaster of some kind were portending.

## CHAPTER XLII

Eva went straight upstairs to her room; she lay down on the bed in the darkness feeling physically exhausted; only her brain seemed vividly, cruelly awake and still able to suffer and be tortured.

She kept her eyes shut, but she could not sleep; little, sounds about the house worried her acutely—the rattling of a door, a laugh, a step on the stairs.

Once she heard Philip's voice in the hall below, and she started up with racing pulses to hear what he was saying.

Some friend of his had called in and had evidently asked a casual question about Philip's journey to Rhodesia, for it was her husband's answer that she heard with cruel distinctness.

"Yes—only another fortnight, thank God! I wish it were longer."

He went on then and out of hearing, and Eva lay back on her pillow trembling in every limb.

Only another fortnight! And he wished it were sooner! One day of the fourteen had nearly gone already, and soon all the others would have slipped away. Life would go on just as it was going now, only Philip would not be here. She would listen in vain for his voice or his step; she would long for him in vain.

She moved a little, burying her face in the pillow, but no tears came; she felt that she could never shed another tear as long as she lived.

"And so the way is nicely cleared—for Calligan!"

Philip's mocking voice haunted Lar; he had deliberately chosen to put a wrong construction on her defence of him; he had heaped his insults on her, and yet, though he had all but killed her pride and broken her heart, he could not kill her love. He was as much to her now as he had been in the old romantic days when she had besought the moon to give her his love.

But this was the end of it at last; to-night she meant to burn her boats once and for ever; to make it impossible for her to ever return to him, ever to give him another chance; he had shown her the way himself, and this time she would take it.

A clock in the house somewhere struck eight! Only eight! She felt that days had passed since she came to Apsley.

When the last stroke died away she got up and went over to the window, drawing aside the blind.

A dark night! Not a trace of moon or stars, with a restless wind tossing the branches of the trees and rustling the few leaves left still clinging to them.

She moved away and changed her frock for the one in which she had travelled from town. She put on her hat and coat and repacked the small suitcase she had brought with her. Then she turned out the light and went again to the window, unfastening it softly.

It opened on to a small balcony over the porch, and on one side were shallow, twisted steps leading to the garden.

The study window was immediately below, and she could see a stream of yellow light from it shining out on to the lawn.

She went back, took her suitcase and, closing the window quietly behind her, stole down the steps. They ended in a little iron gate which was usually kept locked, but to-night it yielded to her hand, and she pushed it wide and stepped down into the garden.

The blinds were undrawn in the study, and she caught a brief glimpse of Philip as she hurried by. He was sitting

in his favourite attitude on the edge of the table, hands deep<sup>ly</sup> thrust into his jacket pockets, head down-bent, so that she could not see his face.

He must have heard the little deprecating creak made by the iron gate as she closed it, for he moved and glanced over his shoulder towards the window. He listened, but the sound was not repeated, and he went back to his old listless attitude.

If anyone had asked him what were his thoughts, he would have found it difficult to say. They were so chaotic, so confused, that it seemed almost impossible to seek one out and consider it apart from the rest. He got up presently and wandered round the room. He picked up a book, opened it and threw it aside; he lit a cigarette and let it go out; he could settle to nothing. He went out into the hall and got into his overcoat; he felt that he must go out—that he would stifle if he stayed in the house. He knew his mother was alone in the drawing-room, but he could not face her; he knew that Eva was upstairs, and it struck him with a grim sort of humour that they should all three be alone, equally miserable and equally incapable of helping one another.

Just as he was opening the front door a bell rang. Philip pulled the latch back and found Peter Dennison standing on the doorstep.

The light from the hall lamp shone full on Peter's face; such a white face, with such miserable eyes, that for a moment Philip was taken aback; then he said hurriedly:—

"What's up? Anything wrong? Come in."

Peter passed him and stood in the hall.

"I want to see Bonnie," he said in a queer, uncertain voice. "I want to see Bonnie."

Philip led the way back to the library.

"Come in. I'll send for her. She's upstairs. Come in, old chap. What's up?"

Peter looked at him with hard, accusing eyes.

"I've nothing to say to you," he said shakily. "It's Bonnie I want to see—I want to ask her pardon—to—" He stopped.

Philip looked at him with sudden anxiety; then he called to a maid crossing the hall:—

"Will you please find my wife? Ask her to come here. Say that Mr. Peter Dennison wants to see her."

He went back to the library and closed the door.

"If there's anything wrong, and I can be of any help —" he said awkwardly. "Anything I can do—only too pleased. . . ."

Peter turned on him with sudden passion.

"You!" he said. "You've done enough already

should think—you—you—cad! By God, if I'd only known it before." His face twitched with boyish emotion; for the first time in his life he was not in the least afraid of young Winterdick; for the first time in his life he felt that they met as equals.

Philip had flushed to the roots of his hair, but he controlled himself with an effort.

"You'll have to explain this," he began, then broke off.

"Well—well—what is it?"

The maid had come to the door again.

"Please, sir, Mrs. Winterdick is not in her rooms."

Philip made an impatient gesture.

"Very well! Find her! She may be with my mother."

He waited till the door had closed, then turned again to Peter. "And, now, what the devil do you mean?" he demanded.

Peter laughed. "I've nothing to say to you," he said again. "You can bluster and make as much fuss as you like—I'm not afraid of you or your bullying, and I'm not your wife to be spoken to as you choose."

His voice had risen excitedly, but there was a sort of steadiness in his eyes which for a moment checked Philip's rage.

"I don't know what the devil you mean," he said quietly. "If you've got anything against me, let's hear what it is before we have any more heroics. I suppose you've run your head into a brick wall——" he added with a mirthless laugh. "Anyway, what is it?"

His calmness disarmed Peter; for a moment he did not reply, then he said with a rush:

"I've just found out about this—this horrible marriage. Perhaps you think I've known all along! Well, I tell you that I haven't. I never knew a word about it till to-day—and even then I didn't believe it till the gov'nor himself . . ." His voice broke a little and he bit his lip hard. "I can see now that it's true enough—I suppose even you won't deny it——"

"Go on . . ."

"Well—well, in the first place it was—was Miss Arlington who told me. She only guessed it—she didn't know anything definitely." He choked suddenly. "Perhaps you know that she's chucked me," he went on in hoarse defiance. "Perhaps it's even for your sake—I don't know—I don't—care!" He ran a finger round his absurdly high collar. "I suppose you think it serves us right, us Dennisons—for trying to get in with you," he went on. "Perhaps it does—perhaps we didn't know when we were well off—however, that's nothing to do with it. I suppose I ought to be glad that I've been chucked

before it's too late—that I'm not tied up like—like Bonnie is." He swung round with sudden passion. "It makes my blood boil to think what you've done to her," he said. "To think that you've ruined her life—that she can't ever undo it, or get away from you . . . It wasn't playing fair—it was a mean, low-down trick—you know—you must have known that she cared for you! That she always had! You traded on that—it was a vile, caddish

"One moment"—Philip was as white as death, but his voice was perfectly controlled. "I suppose you mean me to gather from all this—abuse—that you've heard of the—arrangement—between my father and your's. . . . Very well! But in common fairness I should like you to remember that your sister was also a party to it. She knew exactly what she was doing when she married me—if, as you say, I married her for money, she married me for some equally—rotten—reason! . . . I've no wish to blame her—I don't. The whole thing is my own fault—but . . . but to pretend that it was an unfair bargain, that there was anything more on her side than—than there was on mine—is—is . . . twaddle!" He laughed shortly. "You say that your sister—cares for me—" He shrugged his shoulders. "Make sure of your facts before you speak in future, my boy—and let me tell you that, instead of my being the—fortunate man to have won her regard, there is someone else—someone . . ."

"You liar—you damned liar. . . ." Peter was almost sobbing with rage. He made a furious lunge at Philip with upraised fist, but Philip caught his wrist and held it fast in a grip of steel. For a moment the two men looked at one another in passionate antagonism, then Philip flung the boy from him with a sort of affectionate contempt.

"You'd better sit down a minute and get cool," he said, breathlessly.

Peter dropped into a chair and hid his face. He had gone through a great deal since parting with his sister that morning, and he was shaken with hysterical emotion.

Philip went out into the hall. He stood at the foot of the stairs and called to his wife.

"Eva!" There was no answer, and he went up the stairs two at a time and knocked at her door.

The maid to whom he had spoken downstairs came to him.

"Mrs. Winterdick is not in her room, sir—she's not in the drawing-room, either—I've looked everywhere."

Philip frowned. He opened the door of his wife's room and switched on the light. The room was empty, but the bed was disordered a little where she had been lying, and

the frock she had worn at dinner that night lay in a heap by the dressing-table just as it had fallen from her.

"She must be in the house somewhere—ask—no, wait; I'll go myself."

He went downstairs with a faint sense of apprehension at his heart. She must be somewhere about, of course—he went straight to his mother.

"I can't find Eva—isn't she with you?"

"I haven't seen her since dinner—she went to her room, she looked ill, but she insisted that there was nothing the matter." Mrs. Winterdick rose. "Is anything wrong, Phil?"

"No, but Peter Dennison is here and wants her."

He went out again. He stood for a moment in the hall, not knowing what to do; the maid came down the stairs to him.

"I think Mrs. Winterdick must have gone out, sir—her hat and coat are not in her room."

"Of course!" He drew a breath of relief. "I forgot! She said she should go home this evening. I'll walk over and meet her."

He rejoined Peter.

"Eva's gone over to your place. I'll walk back with you and meet her." He looked at his brother-in-law for a moment in silence; then he said impulsively: "Look here, Peter; if there's anything more, I'd much rather have it now and done with it. All this has been a shock to you; I'm sorry—I'd give a great deal to be able to undo my share in it. . . . But it's no use getting things all mixed up, you know—Eva knew—there wasn't any—dirty trick played on her as you say there was, though—though I suppose that's not my fault," he added bitterly.

Peter looked up; his face was distorted with grief and passion.

"It's not true," he said venomously. "She didn't know! She may have told you so, but it's not the truth . . . and I've been so rotten to her—only this morning—and last night . . . and she's always been such a brick to me . . ." he added brokenly.

Philip took a step forward laying his hand on Peter's shoulder.

"What do you mean—that she didn't know?" he asked in a queer voice. "Why do you insist that she—didn't know?"

"I ought not to tell you—she made me promise—but I must now—I must! It was the day you were married—after we came back from church. I went upstairs to hurry her—you were waiting . . ."

Peter broke down for a moment, then struggled on again.

"Something had happened—something dreadful—I don't know what it was, and she wouldn't tell me . . . but she looked as if someone had stabbed her—she clung to me and cried . . . I shall never forget her face as long as I live," added poor Peter brokenly.

Philip swallowed hard; he walked away and came back again.

"Yes, but—but that's nothing," he said with an effort. "If that's all . . ."

"But it isn't! It isn't! . . . Afterwards, when you'd both gone, we found her veil—her wedding veil—she'd torn it in two—it looked as if it had been trampled on; and her flowers—the flowers you gave her—she'd thrown them across the room; they were all broken and bruised." Peter rose to his feet, his hands clenched, as if he hardly knew what to do with himself. "I believe it was only then that she knew—" he insisted wretchedly. "I don't know why I think so, but I'm sure—I'm sure! She's hidden it ever since; she's never let anyone know—she's laughed and pretended—that's so like Bonnie. . . . She wouldn't even tell me—and I've asked her ever so many times. Then—last night—I told her I was ashamed of her because of Calligan. . . ."

"Calligan!" said Philip savagely. Peter rounded on him.

"He's been decent to her, anyway," he said hotly. "And that's more than we have—you and I!"

There was a little silence; then Philip took Peter's hat from the chair where he had thrown it down and handed it to him.

"Come along—we'll go and find her," he said.

They went out into the darkness together; they walked fast and neither of them spoke till as they reached the Dennisons' house. Philip said in a strangled voice—

"Supposing she isn't here?" The fear had been growing in his heart all the way, the words seemed forced from him.

"Of course she's here," said Peter irritably. He opened the door with his key and Philip followed him in.

The house was very quiet; Peter looked into two of the rooms.

"I know the gov'nor's in, anyway," he said brusquely. "I only left him to come to you."

Peter went upstairs and found Mr. Dennison in his wife's boudoir listening with an air of boredom to her complaints because she chose to think that the vicar's wife had deliberately cut her that afternoon.

"Well, what's it matter if she did?" he was saying tartly



as Peter opened the door. "I'll stop my subscription to the church; I'll——" He broke off.

Peter spoke:—

"Where's Bonnie? Philip's downstairs. He wants her."

Mrs. Dennison answered him fretfully:—

"She hasn't been here—hasn't even troubled to come and see her own mother, after all these weeks. You would have thought that my only daughter——"

Peter went out again.

"We must have missed her on the road," he told Philip. "She hasn't been here. What are you going to do? Wait, or——"

"I'm going back." Philip was already at the door. Peter followed.

Philip walked at such a rate it was all Peter could do to keep pace with him. Presently he asked a breathless question:—

"What's the hurry? Here, that's not the way."

"I'm going to the station first."

"Station! But——"

He asked no more questions. He felt instinctively that something was desperately wrong. He stood by anxiously while Philip questioned a porter:—

"Has the last train gone to town?"

"Yes, sir."

Philip glanced at his watch.

"When's the first one up in the morning?"

"Nothing till the nine-five, sir."

Philip turned away. Peter caught a glimpse of his face in the yellow lamp outside, and a sudden nameless fear shot through him, but nothing was said till they were in the road again; then Philip broke out hoarsely:—

"Look here—I'm going to run. I've got to get up to town to-night. There's no train, so I shall take the car. You can come if you like, but make up your mind quickly." Peter's mind was made up already.

"I'll come," he said briefly.

They raced back through the dark lanes; they were panting and breathless when they reached the Highway House; Philip paused a moment; he was sick with fear and dread; Peter glanced at him and broke out:—

"She may be here—let me go and see first."

"Very well—but I know she isn't—I'll get the car."

He went off round to the garage; a moment later Peter rejoined him. "Well—well?" Philip asked.

Peter shook his head. They took the car round to the front door; Philip went in for a moment to find his mother; he explained hurriedly.

"I'm going up to town—with Eva." He dared not tell her the truth; he gripped her hand hard for a moment. "It's all right—don't ask any questions, there's a dear, and don't worry." He kissed her and was gone; a moment later he and Peter were racing towards London.

The little car seemed to fly over the road; Philip was driving recklessly without being in the least conscious of it; they had gone some miles before Peter spoke:—

"Where are you going—to the flat?"

"No."

Presently Peter tried again.

"She may not have come up to town at all; what makes you think she has?"

No answer. Peter drew the rug more closely about him; he was chilled and miserable. It was long past midnight when they reached London; the streets were deserted save for an occasional taxicab or a solitary policeman.

Philip slowed down a little—he seemed to be looking for some particular turning; suddenly he swerved the car round, turned sharply to the right, and stopped outside a high, unpretentious looking block of flats.

Peter glanced up at it impatiently; there was only one lighted window of the many overlooking the street; he asked an irritable question.

"What on earth . . . who lives here?" Philip got out; he shut the low door of the car with a little slam; his brother-in-law caught a glimpse of his face as he turned away, and in all his life he never forgot the look in Philip's eyes or the tone of his voice as he answered hoarsely:

"Calligan."

A moment later he was hammering at the door.

## CHAPTER XLIII

CALLIGAN had passed a miserable day. He had rung up the Winterdicks' flat in the morning, and learned that Eva had gone to Apsley, and since then he had not known a minute's peace.

He had done the right thing in urging her to go, he knew, and yet he hated to think of her down at the Highway House, unhappy, and in all probability, unwanted. He felt as if he had deliberately driven her to further pain and suffering.

He had tried to get into touch with Peter and failed. He had spent the day wandering about town more wretched than he had ever been in all his life, and during the long

evening he had sat in the untidy sitting-room at his bachelor flat, smoking innumerable cigarettes and seeing Eva's face in every cloud of smoke.

It was a quarter to two when he heard a car come up the street, and instantly he was sure that in some way, this late visitor was connected with himself.

But he never for a moment guessed that it would be Philip, and he fell back with a little ejaculation of surprise when, as he opened the door, Philip pushed roughly past him and went on uninvited into the sitting-room.

Calligan followed. He made no comment, but his quick eyes saw the way in which Philip looked hurriedly round as if in search of someone, and his heart began to thump.

Eva! Where was she? What had happened? But he betrayed nothing of his agitation; he waited quietly for Philip to explain. Then all at once Philip turned on him with a roar.

"Where is she?" She's been here, I know! Where is she?"

Calligan met his friend's eyes steadily; he saw their mad look of passion, and knew that it would only infuriate him more to pretend that he did not understand. He answered at once:—

"I have not seen your wife since last night; she went down to Apsley this morning, I believe—I give you my word of honour, Philip, that I have not seen her since last night, and that I have not the least idea where she is."

"It's an infernal lie! I don't believe you . . . She's been here . . . She left Apsley to-night by the last train. She meant to come to you—she did come to you. She's been to this flat—it's no use denying it. I wouldn't believe you if you swore it." His voice broke; he held shaking hands to his friend. "Tom—for God's sake, tell me where she is—"

Calligan was very white, but he stood his ground resolutely.

"I give you my word of honour that I don't know," he said steadily. "She has not been here—if she had . . ." He stopped; he could not trust himself to say any more, then he broke out again. "What has happened? Why do you think she's here?—Heavens, man!—why can't you explain—?"

Philip's white face flushed scarlet.

"You! to ask for explanations," he sneered. "I tell you this pretended innocence doesn't go down with me." His voice rose again passionately, his chest heaved with his laboured breathing; he turned on Calligan suddenly with raised fists. "Where is she—tell me where she is, you . . ."

Calligan did not flinch.

"If I knew, I would tell you," he said quietly. "Not because you deserve it—not because you deserve any consideration from her or from me, but because I care for her so much that I'd give my life to see her happy. . . ." Now—he flung at young Winterdick with defiance—"you've got your answer, and I hope you like it."

Philip passed a shaking hand across his mouth. He was half convinced of his friend's honesty, but that drive up from Apsley through the darkness had been torture for him, and he could not so readily forget it.

"She meant to come to you—I know she did——" he said again with anguish. "Where is she if she's not here? There's nobody else she would have gone to. . . . Oh, don't stand there like that!" he broke out stormily. "Say something—suggest something . . . for God's sake. . . ."

Calligan's face quivered. "You'd better search the place," he said hoarsely, "if you don't believe me. I tell you I don't know where your wife is." His pale face blazed suddenly. "I suppose you've been a brute to her again—I suppose you've been torturing her and half driving her mad. In the name of heaven, Philip, what's come over you! What are you made of that you treat her as you do! You seem very sure that she would come to me. I wish I were as sure—I wish I knew that she cared enough to come——" His voice rose excitedly. "I wish she cared one-hundredth part as much for me as she does for you. She shouldn't ever have gone back to you, I promise. She——"

Philip turned slowly.

"Care for me!" he said in a hoarse voice. "She never cared for me. . . ." He waited a moment, staring at Calligan with eyes that pleaded for a contradiction, of his words, that implored it, even while in his heart he knew there was no smallest hope of getting it.

It was Calligan who looked away first.

"You've never deserved that she should," he said with an effort. "But if we men only got what we deserve it would be a pretty poor look out for some of us." He raised his sad eyes to Philip's again and suddenly he said agitatedly: "Phil—you don't mean . . . you weren't such a fool as not—to know that she cared?"

Philip tried to speak, but no words would come. He groined backwards for a chair and dropped into it, his arms outflung on the table, his face buried in them.

Then Calligan drew a breath like a sigh. He laid a hand on his friend's shoulder.

"Poor old chap. . . ." As yet his mind was but a

chaos of agitation in which he groped blindly for the truth; but he was beginning to see it slowly, and to understand that after all it had not been only Eva who had suffered.

He walked over to the sideboard and mechanically mixed a couple of whiskies. He brought them back to the table and gave Philip a little shake.

"Here—buck up," he said with rough kindness. "I can't help you till I know what's happened. . . ."

Philip raised his head.

"She's gone. . . . We—she. . . . Oh, I was a brute. She never answered me when I—but I knew—I could see it in her eyes—all through that confounded dinner. . . . She looked like death, and then. . . ."

"Well, the thing is to find her. You say she left Apsley. You are sure—sure?" Calligan's voice was wrung with anxiety.

"Yes—as sure as I can be." Philip got to his feet. He looked like a man on the verge of a bad breakdown. "Peter's outside—I brought him up in the car."

Calligan left the room and came back a second later with his overcoat.

"I'm ready," he said. "She may have gone to the flat."

"No—no, she won't have done that."

They went down the stairs together. At the bottom Philip said shamefacedly: "Tom—"

"Well?"

"I—I should like to beg your pardon."

Calligan laughed mirthlessly.

"Oh, I shouldn't do that. As I told you, if I'd been given the opportunity you might be looking for me now with a revolver."

He went on into the street hurriedly to avoid further words. He spoke to Peter—a cold, miserable-looking Peter, huddled up in the car, half-asleep.

Peter listened sulkily to Calligan's brief explanation.

"It's all a wild-goose chase," he said irritably. "She's probably at Apsley all the time. Why doesn't Philip phone up and see?"

"He couldn't get an answer at this time of the morning; nobody would ever hear the ring." He gave Peter a little shove. "Move up and make room—we're going round to the flat."

The three crushed into the narrow seat and Philip took the wheel again.

## CHAPTER XLIV

THE eyes of the three men were straining through the darkness to catch sight of the windows of the flat long before they had reached it. But there was no light in any of them, and Peter shivered as he moved his cramped limbs and followed his companions to the door.

There was a faint tinge of daylight in the sky. It was an eerie grey light that gave them all a wretched, ghostly appearance as Philip opened the door with his latchkey. There was not a sound in the flat; the place had a horribly deserted look in the flood of electric light jerked on by Philip's impatient hand.

None of them spoke; Peter and Calligan stood waiting while Philip went across to his wife's room and opened the door—they heard the little click made by the switch as he turned the light on, and then it seemed an interminable silence before he came back to them.

He shook his head; he could not trust his voice; he led the way to the dining-room and the others followed.

There was a dead fire in the grate and the blinds were undrawn, letting in the first grey streak of dawn; the whole room looked cheerless and depressing.

Philip threw his coat down on a chair; he knelt down by the fire and tried to fan its deadness into flame with a newspaper—there was a curiously grey tinge in his face.

Calligan stood by, silently watching.

Suddenly he spoke.

"You want some sticks, old man—there used to be some kept in the log box in your study."

Philip glanced up and away again; a bitter pain shot through his heart. Calligan had spoken quite naturally, as if he knew everything about the workings of the flat.

"All right—you might get some."

He had not even known that there was a log box himself. Calligan must have been very much at home here, he thought, in spite of his pretended indifference.

He threw the newspaper aside and flung himself into a chair. Where was Eva?—supposing he never saw her again? A hundred doubts and fears had tortured him since he had satisfied himself that she was not, with Calligan; she had no friends in London to whom she could go. . . . Where was she? Where was she? His own helplessness nearly drove him mad. A stifled groan escaped him.

Calligan turned, he looked at Philip sharply. "All right?" he asked with gruff sympathy.

Philip scowled.

"Go and get the wood—I'm frozen."

Calligan went away. He crossed the hall quietly, and opened the library door. Darkness and silence here, too, and he had spent so many happy hours in this room. Something seemed to catch him by the throat as he thought of the past and realised that after to-night, whatever happened, it could never come again. Though he had not known it, he had parted from Eva finally last night when he urged her to go to Apsley. She would not have gone if he had said one word to keep her.

He groped along the wall for the light, and switched it on. The log box was close to the fireplace; he turned towards it, then stopped with a little choking cry, for there, curled up in the big leather armchair, fast asleep, was Philip's wife.

He stood transfixed in the doorway; for a moment the shock of seeing Eva robbed him of all power; then with an effort he pulled himself together, closed the door softly behind him, and went over to her as she lay asleep in the big armchair.

There was an infinite tenderness in his face; he loved her so well—loved her with all the great unselfishness of which he was capable, and he knew as plainly as if he had been told that this moment had been given to him in which to bid her good-bye.

He had only desired her happiness, and he knew instinctively that she stood now on its threshold, and that whatever small place he had filled in her life it would soon no longer exist; greater, more complete happiness would wipe out everything else, and if she ever thought of him at all it would be perhaps a little ashamedly when she remembered the broken confession she had once made to him.

She was sleeping so peacefully. She still wore her big travelling coat, and from its big upstanding collar her dainty head and slender throat rose like some graceful flower. Her hat had fallen on to the floor beside her, and her hair was slightly ruffled by the cushions of the big chair.

Had she meant to come to him, even as Philip had said?—in his heart he longed to know, and yet now he never would.

He wondered how he would have acted had she done such a thing—if he would have been man enough to send her away or if he would have taken advantage of her loneliness and unhappiness to bind her to him. It would not

have meant happiness for either of them. He was wise enough to know that and to know also that she had never cared for anyone but Philip.

He stood in silence looking down at her, his heart in his sad eyes. It was the end of everything for him, and though he had always known how it must end, the knowledge had not served to soften the blow now it had fallen.

He bent over her, taking in every detail of her face—the delicate arch of her brows, the curve of her mouth and the childish way in which her hair broke into soft ringlets about her ears.

He longed to kiss her just once, but he knew that the right was not his even though he had loved her since the first moment of their meeting. It seemed strange that she should never have guessed it.

She stirred a little in her sleep and he held his breath thinking she would waken, but she only turned her face a little further from him as if in mute protest against the desire in his heart and then lay quiet once more.

“ . . . Somewhere, to someone, this is the golden hour—”

The words floated into his mind and he wondered idly where he had heard them.

He roused himself with a sigh. It was not his golden hour, anyway. He was only a trespasser here, a trespasser with tears in his honest eyes as he bent and laid his lips for a moment to her hair and then to the little limp hand which bore his friend's ring.

A thrill of gladness passed through his heart at the knowledge that he and Philip could still be friends; that no action of his had made it impossible to look Philip in the eyes again.

Then with a murmured “ God bless you ” he went away without a backward glance.

He met Philip in the hall, a haggard Philip, whose tragic eyes told their own tale of suffering. He broke out incoherently as he saw Calligan:

“ I can't stop here—I can't rest—I'm going back to Apsley to see if she's there. You'll look after Peter, . . . I can't rest till I've found her . . . I'll get off a) once.”

There was the faintest possible silence, when Calligan said slowly: “ There's no need, she's here—in your room. ”

He caught Philip's elbow and steadied him. “ She's all right,” he said. “ She's asleep.”

He did not look at young Winterdick's face. He felt that the relief and joy which he knew he would read there would be more than he could stand just now. He waited a moment, then he turned away and Philip went on alone to the open door across the hall.



Eva was no longer sleeping. The voices of the two men outside had roused her, and she was sitting up with startled eyes and flushed cheeks.

She was not quite awake yet, and for a moment she looked at Philip almost without recognition, as he shut the door behind him and came over to where she sat in the big chair. He went down on his knees and put his arms round her, hiding his face in her lap.

"Forgive me—forgive me—forgive me!"

He hardly knew what he said; his arms clutched her desperately. Even now he could hardly believe that the long torture of the night was ended and that she was here, safe in his arms.

She sat staring down at his bowed head with dazed eyes. The shock of waking to find him there kept her silent, then suddenly she gave a little shuddering cry, striving to free herself from his clasp.

"Let me go . . . let me go . . . I never meant you to find me—I don't want you any more—I never meant to come back . . . oh, I don't want you any more!"

Philip raised his arms from her waist till they were clasped about her shoulders. He tried to draw her down to him, but she resisted him fiercely. She flung her head back as far as she could from his reach. She held him off with her hands against his chest.

"I don't want you—I don't want you. . . . Let me go."

Philip bent his head and kissed the hands that held him from her.

"I love you—I adore you," he said incoherently. "I'll never let you go again. I can't live without you—believe me! You must believe me."

"No . . . no"—she was half fainting; her eyes were wild—"You told me that before, and it wasn't true . . . and now I don't care . . . I don't care. You've hurt me so much—you can't hurt me any more. . . . Philip, Philip, let me go. . . ."

"Not till you forgive me—I've been a brute, but it was because I love you so much. Last night—you drove me half mad. I thought it was Calligan you cared for. . . . I thought—oh, forgive me for what I thought! Forgive me, and I try to care for me—just a little. . . ."

She stopped struggling. She sat quite still, a queer, mocking light in her eyes.

"A little!" She gave a hard laugh. "I cared for you more than that once—I cared for you so much . . . so much . . ." The words died away on a sobbing sigh. "But it's all gone now, all gone—I only want to be left alone—to try and forget that I ever knew you. Oh, let me go; your arms hurt me . . ."

Philip released her at once and rose to his feet.

He made no attempt to follow her when she moved away from him. She was as white as death, but now her voice was almost steady as she spoke.

"I meant to go away with Mr. Calligan last night. I may as well tell you, so that you can think the very worst of me once and for all . . ." She made a little gesture of defiance. "I went to his flat, and I walked up and down—up and down . . . oh, for hours I should think! Once I almost rang the bell . . ." She laughed confusedly. "I don't know why I didn't . . . I suppose perhaps—because in spite of what you all think of me. I suppose I was never really meant to be that sort of woman . . ."

"Eva—for God's sake . . ."

But she went on heedlessly, her eyes blazing.

"He would have been kind to me, anyway—he didn't hate to be with me, and try to find excuses to get away from me. He is the only one in all the world who really cares what becomes of me." Her face twisted into a spasm of pain. "Peter—even Peter told me yesterday that he was ashamed of me . . ." She wrung her hands in anguish. "And you . . ." She turned her eyes to her husband's face.

"I love you—I have always loved you," Philip said hoarsely. "You never cared for me, I know that, but it hasn't made any difference; I'd give my life for you this minute if you'd just love me for a day, for an hour . . ."

Eva shivered a little, looking away from him. "It's too late—now—anyway," she said with a sort of hopeless monotony. "I don't want you—now . . . you're going away, and . . . and I . . ."

"I'm not going—I'm never going to leave you again. Last night is nothing—Calligan is nothing. Nothing you can ever do will make me love you less. It's all been my fault. Come back to me and I'll make you forget the past—I'll make you love me—we'll start all over again."

"No—no."

His face quivered a little.

"I'll do anything you wish—I'll give my life to make you happy, but I can't live without you. You've got to believe me—you've got to come back. You don't know how—how decent I can be if I try."

The words were hopelessly inadequate, and he realised it with despair. He took a step towards her, and she backed away from him to the door.

"I don't want you. Why did you follow me? I never meant to see you again—"

There was a little silence.

"Then—then why did you come back here last night?" Philip asked in a strangled voice.

She looked at him without answering. Then suddenly she broke into a little wail:

"Oh, I don't know—I don't know. . . . I suppose I was afraid. I don't remember how I came back or why. . . ."

"You came because you are my wife," said Philip agitatedly. "You came because you knew that neither Calligan nor any other man could come between us. You came because in your heart you know that I love you—you know that I adore you. . . ."

He caught her in his arms. He held her fiercely, crushing her to him, almost robbing her of breath.

"I'll never let you go till you say that you love me. I'll never let you go till you say you've forgiven me. . . . Even if I were sure that you hated me I'd never let you go. You're my wife. . . ."

"I don't love you—"

"I'll make you. You can't look at me and still say that. . . ." He felt that this was the last desperate fight for his happiness. His love for her and the fear of losing her made him cruel. He held her so that she could not escape him or even turn her face away. It gave him a sort of exultation to see the way the colour faded from her cheeks and how for a moment her eyes closed before the passionate insistence of his.

"Oh, if you'd just let me go," she whispered faintly.

Philip laughed roughly.

"If you can look at me and tell me that you don't love me you shall go," he said. He waited a moment, but she did not raise her eyes.

"If you can look at me and tell me that you love Calligan—you shall—go," he said hoarsely.

She looked at him now—she felt as if her resistance was slipping from her beneath his will.

"Do you love him," Philip demanded, between his teeth.

"No—no. . . ." It was only a whisper.

"O. that other man. . . ." He could hardly speak.

A little pucker of perplexity crossed her face.

"I don't know who you mean. . . . I don't know who you mean."

"You mean that you won't answer—won't tell me. . . . That night—before we were married—when I found you in the moonlight. You told me afterwards . . . that there was some man—some man you had cared for. . . . Answer me, answer me. . . . Do you care for him still? Who is he? I will know! I tell you, I will!"

He shook her in his passionate jealousy. His grasp bruised her soft flesh.

For a moment it seemed as if she still meant to defy him and deny him. Then suddenly she gave in as if some giant hand had broken her frail resistance.

"It was you! You," she said, laughing wildly. "It was always you, only you never guessed . . . but now—it's too late now—I don't care any more—it's all gone . . . it's all gone . . . oh, Philip—I'm falling . . . falling—" Her voice broke off with a little strangled cry of fear as she fainted in his arms.

#### CHAPTER XLIV

"It's all right," said Calligan shakily. "She's coming round. Look! She's opening her eyes."

He drew back hurriedly as Eva stirred a little.

They had carried her into the dining-room where Calligan had at last succeeded in making the fire burn, and she was lying on the couch, her head supported against Philip's arm.

It was broad daylight now. Out in the street the rumble of traffic had already commenced and long streaks of sunshine were piercing the grey clouds.

Calligan gave one last look at Eva and the man who knelt beside her, then motioned to Peter and the two went softly away.

There was a little silence. Eva tried to raise herself, but fell back again weakly. Her hair was streaming about her shoulders, her face was wet. She felt as if she had just struggled through a bad illness to an unwanted convalescence.

A long sigh of weariness escaped her. Her lids seemed weighted, but after a moment she dragged them open to find Philip bending over her.

She lay quite still looking up at him. Her heart seemed to stop beating. Her whole body felt cold and tense; then suddenly the tears came. She covered her face with shaking hands and began to sob.

"Darling—my darling . . ."

Philip gathered her into his arms as tenderly as any woman could have done. He drew her head down to his shoulder and laid his cheek to hers. He held her hand against his lips, kissing it again and again. He could not trust himself to speak. Shame, joy and a hundred and one emotions tore his heart.

Presently the jobs quietened a little and she lay still, her face hidden against his shoulder.

Philip found his voice then—

"There is so much I want to tell you—and I don't know where to begin; but first of all, I'm never going to leave you again. I'm going to take you away—somewhere—and show you that I'm not—not always a brute . . ." His voice broke, but he struggled on.

"And we've wasted all this time . . . I've been such a fool—I ought to have made you listen to me . . . Eva—you said . . . was it true when you said that—the man you . . . you told me about that night—was it really me?"

He felt her tremble in his arms, but she did not speak, and he went on again: "Do you think—perhaps—some day . . . you might get to care for me again? I'll be so patient . . . I know you must hate the sight of me now—but . . . perhaps . . . some day . . ."

She raised herself then, turning a little from him.

"If I could only just forget it all——" she said tremblingly. "You don't know what it's been—how I've been hurt . . . Last night—I meant to have left you—last night . . ."

The hot colour flamed in her face. "That's what I've come to," she said defiantly.

"It's what I've driven you to . . . My God, if I'd only known . . ."

Her tears began to fall again.

"I did love you—oh, I did love you," she said brokenheartedly.

"I know—I . . ." Philip could not go on. He laid her gently down and got up, walking away to the window. "But it's not too late yet," he said presently, trying to steady his voice. "I'll teach you to care again—I can—I know I can." He waited a moment, then came back to her. He bent over her, trying to smile.

"You're such a kid, after all," he said huskily. "Why, I could pick you up and run away with you if I chose. And to think you're a married woman! To think you're my wife." He turned his face sharply away, and for a moment there was silence. He kept her hand in his, and presently asked:

"You said something to me—about a note . . . when we were down at Apsley. . . . When was it? . . . He parsed a hand over his eyes, trying to remember. "It seems so long ago . . . what note did you mean, Eva? Oh, don't let there be any more misunderstandings between us," he broke out as she shook her head. "I

want to know it all—everything, and I want to tell you everything, too—but I can't seem to remember."

She turned her face against the cushions so he could not see her eyes. "I wrote you a note—the last night before we came up to town; I—I—oh, I wanted to be friends with you," she added piteously.

Philip tried to laugh. "Friends!" he said brokenly.

"I left it for you—downstairs . . . close to your slippers—I was so sure you would see it. I asked you to come and speak to me, but . . . but you didn't, and so . . ."

"You thought I had it! Eva, I swear to you . . ." His voice rose excitedly and he felt her fingers quiver in his. He sat down beside her again.

"I never had the note . . . If I had . . . but it's too late to think of that now. Thank God, we can understand one another before it's too late. . . ."

She looked away from his impassioned eyes.

"But you didn't love me . . ." she said tremblingly. "You didn't love me. . . ."

Philip slipped an arm beneath her head, bending over her.

"I began to love you from the day I asked you to marry me," he said. "The night of that infernal dinner party, when Kitty Arlington fainted. . . . Yes, you've got to hear it all," he insisted as she winced. "She's nothing to me—I can see now that I owe her a sort of gratitude for letting me find out that it was you all the time I cared for . . . I knew it that night. I wish to heaven I had told you; but . . . I suppose I was—afraid. . . . I put it off to tell you when we were married, and then. . . ." He paused. "Before I could speak or say a word you . . . you . . ." he clenched his hand.

Eva freed herself from his arm. There was a fiery spot of colour in either cheek.

"It was because I knew the truth. I knew why you'd married me. . . . I knew you didn't care—that it was just to save your people. Oli, can't you imagine how I felt? Can't you realise what it was like to be told—on my wedding day?"

Philip put his hands on her shoulders turning her to him.

"When did you know? Who told you?" he asked.

Her eyes fell. A little quiver of anguish crossed her face.

"Father told me . . . when—when I was changing my dress—to go away with you. . . ."

"Eva!" His voice was full of shamed anger.

"Oh, you mustn't blame him. I don't! I think I've

always been glad that I knew. . . . I might have gone on loving you, believing that you loved me, if I hadn't known—but as it is. . . ." She broke off with a long, quivering sigh.

"And so you said you didn't care for me—you said you'd known all along. . . . You said. . . . Eva, were any of all the ghastly things you said to me that day—true?"

She shook her head.

"I don't know. . . . I—can't remember. . . . I only wanted to make sure that you should never know I—I had cared. . . . It—it was like being stabbed and left to die. . . . It was like . . ." She caught her trembling lip between her teeth. After a moment she went on with an effort. "So you see . . . I only—want to—forget. . . ."

"You mean that . . . you won't ever care—again, that nothing I can ever do. . . ."

She looked away from him into the cheery fire.

"It all seems so long ago," she said faintly.

It seemed an eternity before either of them spoke; then Philip asked huskily:

"That night . . . when I struck you . . . you meant to leave me then—why didn't you? . . ." But he knew why, before she answered.

"It was Mr. Calligan—he made me promise not to. . . ." She raised her sad eyes to her husband's face for a moment. "Oh, he's been a good friend to you," she said earnestly. "He's so often begged me to be patient, to give you another chance. . . ." Her lips twisted as if in pain. "Even the other night—when you came to town and . . . didn't stay here in this flat—I would have gone away then if he'd said one word, but he—Mr. Calligan . . ." Her voice died away.

Philip hid his face in his hands. Calligan! And he had hated him so!

"He's a better chap than I am," he said hoarsely. "I don't wonder you . . . can't forgive me."

He rose to his feet and began pacing the room restlessly. Somehow the confidence he had felt a moment before had deserted him. He knew that he did not deserve to be forgiven. The half-boyish obtuseness which he had never quite outgrown reasserted itself. Perhaps the best thing he could do would be to clear out to Rhodesia as he had intended. Eva did not want him. He might go on breaking his heart, eating his soul out for her unavailingly.

He spoke with his back turned. "Perhaps I'd better go, after all. . . . I suppose it's the only decent thing left for me to do. . . . I'm not wanted—I . . ." For

the life of him he could not continue; he was overwhelmed with desolation.

If she would only say one kind word—only give him a little hope. His heart hungered for it.

He began pacing up and down the room, hands deep thrust into his pockets.

"It's for you to say," he broke out again. "I'll do whatever you want. I don't care a damn for myself—but for you. . . ." He swung round, his face working with unwilling emotion. "It's for you to say—Eva. . . ." he repeated dully.

She was sitting looking into the fire, her hair falling childishly about her, hiding her face. It seemed a long time before she answered uncertainly:—

"Perhaps—if you would rather go. . . ." She rose to her feet and faced him. Then suddenly she put up her hands to her throat as if she were choking. She gave a little stifled cry.

"Philip—Philip, don't go—don't leave me. . . . I can't bear it any more—I've tried not to care—I've tried not to love you—but it's no use. . . . Philip. . . . Philip. . . ." She would have fallen at his feet had he not caught her. He held her by the shoulders, looking into her face with eyes that did not dare to believe her, or to hope.

His heart was hammering in his throat; he could hardly breathe, and his voice sounded strained and cracked when at last he spoke.

"It's the truth! You're not. . . just fooling me! You really mean. . . that you—want me? Oh, my dear—answer me—answer me. . . ."

But she could not speak. She just put her arms round his neck and lifted her face, all tear-wet, and flushed now, like a rose, and with a little inarticulate cry Philip caught her to his heart.

And then for a little while everything was forgotten but the delirium of the moment. The past was wiped out with tears and kisses and incoherent words. When Philip's lips first touched her own, Eva closed her eyes—she was afraid to open them for fear this great happiness should once again prove unreal; when presently he released her and raised his head, she hid her face against his coat in trembling silence.

Philip kissed her hair.

"You do love me?" he whispered.

"You know I do."

"And you've forgiven me—for everything?"

"Yes."

"Look at me then."



"I—I—can't."

"Eva—you're not shy of me!" Philip's voice was a little shaky. "And we're supposed to be such an old, married couple," he went on, trying to laugh. He raised her face, his hand beneath her chin.

"Open your eyes."

After a moment she obeyed.

"Say—'Philip, I love you.'"

"You know I do."

"I don't—you've never told me properly. Darling—please!"

Her lips moved, then suddenly she broke down.

"I can't—I'm so afraid."

"Eva! of me!"

"No—no—but of the future, and the past—of everything! Supposing—supposing you were to find out that after all—you—didn't—really—care?"

There was a little silence, then Philip said in a queer, uncertain voice—

"You're not—you're not—*really*—afraid of that—are you?"

He took his arms from about her and moved back a step.

Eva stood with drooping head, the tears running down her face, then slowly she raised her eyes, and looked at her husband.

There was very much of the boy about him still, there always would be—but just now he was a boy with a man's unhappy eyes, that seemed to be dumbly pleading for a trust and forgiveness which he knew were still being withheld.

Perhaps in that moment of silence she understood just what these last weeks had meant to him—just how much suffering, and despair, and cruel unhappiness, for a little quivering smile of tenderness crossed her face—

"Philip," she said in a whisper, but now he would not help her—he turned away, and leaning his arm on the mantelshelf stared down into the fire morosely—she did not trust him! how then could she really love him?

He counted the seconds by his heart beats till she spoke again.

"Philip——" and now there was a tremulous laugh in her voice. "I was much happier—just now—before you went so far away——"

Philip turned.

"So you love me?" he asked huskily. "And trust me?—and believe in me?"

"With all my heart."

Philip held out his arms.

Peter Denison was half asleep in the library when, some time later, his brother-in-law thrust a sheepish head round the door.

"Oh—er—there you are, then," he said lamely.

He came a step into the room.

"I've just told the maids to get us some breakfast," he explained airily. "Dare say you'll be glad of some—eh?"

"Where's Calligan?"

"Where's Calligan?"

Peter yawned.

"Gone—he wouldn't stay. He wanted to take me along with him, but I'd had enough chasing about for one night."

Peter rose to his feet. He glanced at Philip out of the corner of his eyes.

There was something very youthful and embarrassed about young Winterdick at that moment. His hair was decidedly ruffled and an unkind observer might have thought that his eyes looked suspiciously red.

He fidgeted round the room for a moment.

"Where's Eva?" Peter asked suddenly.

Philip blushed ingenuously.

"Well—she's—er—packing some things . . ." he said.

"I'm—er . . . well, we're going away—for a holiday."

"Oh, sort of second honeymoon," said Peter dryly.

Their eyes met, and suddenly he held out his hand—

"All right—eh?" he asked awkwardly.

Philip seized the hand and wrung it hard.

"Right as rain," he said. "I wish you . . . well, you know—it'll all come right in the end, old chap, you see."

Peter knew what he meant, but he could not answer just then.

"I should like to see Bonnie—presently," he said, after a moment. "I'm going back home this morning—I hate town—never want to come here again. You might ask Bonnie if I can just see her for a moment. . . ."

Philip went across to his wife's room. He was enjoying himself tremendously by pretending that everything that had happened was just a dream, only a dream from which there would never be any need to wake.

Eva was kneeling beside a half-packed box. She rose to her feet as Philip came in and shut the door.

"Have they gone?" she asked apprehensively. She rather dreaded meeting Peter and Calligan again.

"Calligan has, but Peter's here . . . poor old Peter?"

"He'll be glad some day," said Eva quickly. "She was never good enough for him."

"He wants to speak to you . . . There's no hurry."

Wait a minute." He caught her round the waist as she turned to the door.

"Kiss me," he commanded, in his best bullying manner.

"I've kissed you hundreds of times," she protested softly; but she put her arms round his neck willingly enough and laid her cheek against his coat.

Philip bent his face to hers.

"Happy?" he asked in a whisper.

She pretended to frown, though her eyes shone.

"Of course not! How can you expect me to be happy when the only man I have ever loved is squeezing me so tight that . . . oh, Phil!"

He took her face in his hand:

"Do you mean that?" he asked, in passionate earnestness. "Am I really—the only man you have ever loved?"

"Really and truly." She looked past him to the window and the patch of sky above the houses, where a pale half-moon was just fading out of the daylight. "Ask the little man in the moon," she said, between kisses. "The little man in the moon knows."

THE END.

