

## THE SONGBIRD

By Victor Radcliffe.

A beautiful young woman standing at the window of a drawing room, superbly furnished, a young man leaning towards her, tall, aristocratic looking, graceful and composed and with a fine intellectual face—this was the picture. The day was sadly dying, all nature dim and sere, and a weird mournfulness at-



She Sank to the Window Seat.

tached to the actors in a vital life drama and their environment.

This was White Shadows, with princely hospitality known far and wide to the polite world of its district. The young man was the brother and the lonely girl the warmest friend of widowed Beatrice Lane.

"You are determined Lura?" the young man was saying, ever so slight

a shade of coldness showed in the delicate curve of his finely chiseled lips.

Lura Belden lifted both hands clasped in a pleading, distressed way. Her eyes were tender, her voice gentle and appealing.

"Elwyn," she said softly, but with intense eagerness, "it is only two bright years of my life that I ask, not for myself—just for art's sake and—for others."

"Then it is good-bye," definitely responded Elwyn Durand, almost harshly. "The lure of applause, the dower of gold—must I meet it at every step? It is unworthy of you to throw self and frame into the frail scales as against the love of a true and honest heart."

"Oh, you do not understand," cried Lura, but he was gone. She sank to the window seat and watched the dull, dark sun go down in a veil of misty gloom. Her eyes stared straight-ahead as though life had suddenly become a void, happiness a mockery and love a lie.

"The songbird, Lura," thus they had called her, and truly—she of the rapt, glorious voice, whose varied accents thrilled the men and drove women to tears, soothing wonder-eyed little ones to placid sleep and making all the world love her.

The gift had been born with Lura. When a great business crash had wrenched from her mother a royal fortune she had come to the rescue with her peerless voice. First her public singing had been confined to special programmes at the homes of the wealthy of her own set, where she was an honored guest. Then twice she had sung with a great opera company to fill the place of a cantatrice suddenly taken ill.

She had won laurels unexpected, the public prints discovered a real imperatrice. Offers had come to her that were bewildering to her girlish mind.

"Only two years, Elwyn," she had