

His eyes rested upon the soft outline of her ear, half hidden in her brown hair. "What are they?"

She turned her face still farther from him. "It made no difference to me," she said, "whether he came or went. It worried me to be with him, and I was very selfish. When he kissed me it left me cold."

His gaze stung her sharply. "And if you loved some one," he said, "it would make a great difference to you whether he came or went? It would gladden you to be with him, and when he kissed you it would not leave you cold?"

"I—I think so," she answered. He bent toward her swiftly, then checked himself, with a sneering laugh. "I'll give you a piece of valuable advice," he said. "Don't allow yourself to grow sentimental. It is awful rot."

And he threw himself into his chair. He drew a notebook from his pocket, and when she seated herself he did not look up. There was a gray cast about his face, and his lips were compressed. She noticed that he was older than she at first supposed and that the hand with which he held the pencil twitched nervously; then she lay watching him idly from beneath lowered lids.

An hour later he looked up, and their glances met. With sudden determination he closed the book and replaced it in his pocket. "You look pale," he remarked abruptly.

"Do I?" she questioned inanimately. "I do not see any reason why I should not."

"Perhaps, so long as it is not unbecoming to you."

"Why will you say such things?" she demanded angrily. "I detest them."

"Indeed? Yes, pallor is not unbecoming to you. It gives you an interesting look."

She rubbed the cheek next him with the edge of her rug until it glowed scarlet. "There!" she exclaimed in resentment.

"That gives you a radiant look," he remarked composedly.

Her eyes flashed. "You will make me hate you," she retorted.

He smiled slightly, his eyes half sad. "I am trying to," he responded.

She stamped her foot with impatience. "Then you won't succeed. I will not hate you. Do you hear? I will not!"

"Is it a question of will?"

"In this case, yes."

"Do you hate as you choose—and love?" he asked.

"I don't know," she replied. "I hardly think I could hate you if I would, despite your—your hatefulness."

"Not though it were a part of wisdom?"

"Wisdom has nothing to do with"—

"With what?" he questioned.

"With hate."

"Nor with love?"

"Nor with love."

He shook himself free from an imaginary weight, passing his hand across his contracted brow. "Then so much the worse for hate," he responded, "and for love."

As she did not answer he spoke fiercely. "When you love, love a virtuous, straightforward plodder," he said. "Love a man because he is decent—because he is decent and plain and all the things that the romancers laugh at. Love a fool, if you will, but let him be a fool who goes to his office at 9 and leaves it at 6; who craves no more exciting atmosphere than the domestic one of house girl worries and teething babies. If you ever find yourself loving a man like me, you had better make for the nearest lamp post and—hang!"

"Hush!" she cried, her cheeks flaming. "How—how dare you?" Her voice broke sharply, and she fell to sobbing behind her raised hands.

should choose to be broken by you to being caressed by any other man!"

His face whitened. "Don't say that," he protested hoarsely.

"Why not, since it is true?"

"It is not true."

A half moon was mounting into the heavens, and it lit the sea with a path of silver. The pearl colored mist floated ahead of the steamer, fluttering like the filmy garments of a water sprite. A dozen stars hung overhead.

"But it is true," she answered. Her words rang clearly, with a triumphant note. For a time he did not speak. In the light of the half moon she saw the deepening furrows upon his face. His hands were clenched.

"There is time yet," he said at last, "to withdraw a false play. Take your love back."

She trembled, and her lips parted. "I cannot," she replied, "and I would not."

He stretched out his arms as if to draw her toward him, and she faltered



"From the beginning I have lied to you—lied, do you hear?"

before the passion in his glance. Then he fell back. "What a mess you are making of your life!" he said.

But his warning eyes had reassured her. "The mess is already made," she responded.

"But it is not," he returned. Then he summoned his flagging force. "And it shall not be."

"How will you prevent it?"

"By an appeal to reason."

She laughed. "What love was ever ruled by reason?"

"By proofs."

She laughed again. "What proof ever shattered faith?"

"Great God!" he retorted passionately. "Stop! Think a moment! Look things in the face. What do you know of me?"

"I know that I love you."

"I tell you I am a devil!"

"And I do not believe you."

"Go back to America and ask the first man you meet."

"Why should I respect his opinion?"

"Because it is the opinion of the respectable public."

"Then I don't respect the respectable public."

"You ought to."

"I don't agree with you."

Again he was silent, and again he faced her. "What is it that you love in me?" he demanded. "It is not my face."

"Certainly not."

"Nor my manners?"

"Hardly."

"Is there anything about me that is especially attractive?"

"I have not observed it."

"Then I'll be hanged if I know what it is!"

"So will I."

He sighed impatiently. "No woman ever discovered it before," he said, "though I've known all sorts and conditions. But, then, I never knew a woman like you."

"I am glad of that," she responded.

"I would give two-thirds of my future—such as it is—if I had not known you."

"And yet you love me."

He made a step toward her, his face quivering. But his words were harsh. "My love is a rotten reed," he said. Then he turned from her, gazing gloomily out to sea. Across the water the path of moonlight lay unrolled. Small, brisk waves were playing around the flying steamer. Suddenly he faced her.

"Listen!" he said.

She bent her head.

"From the beginning I have lied to you—lied, do you hear? I sinned you out for my own selfish ends. All my kindness, as you call it, was because of its usefulness to me. While you looked on in innocence I made you a tool in my hands for the furtherance of my own purposes. Even those confounded prunes were sent to you from any other motive than sympathy!"

She shivered, supporting herself against the railing. "I—I don't understand," she stammered.

"Then listen again; I needed you, and I used you. There is not a soul in this boat but believes me to be your husband. I have created the impression because I was a desperate man and it aided me. My name is not even Lawrence Smith!"

"Stop!" she said faintly. For an instant she staggered toward him; then her grasp upon the railing tightened. "Go on!" she added.

His face was as gray as the fog which shrouded it. "I left America a hunted man. When I reach the other side I shall find them still upon my tracks. It is for an act which they call

by any ugly name. And yet I would do it over again. It was justice."

She was shivering as from a strong wind. "I—I don't think I understand yet," she said.

"I have led a ruined life," he went on hurriedly. "My past record is not a pretty one, and yet there is no act of my life which I regret so little as the one for which they are running me down. It was a deed of honor, though it left blood upon my hands!"

Her quivering face was turned away. "I reached New York with the assistance of a friend, the only man on earth who knows and believes in me. He secured a stateroom from an L. Smith, who was delayed. I took his name as a safeguard, and when I saw yours beside me at table I concluded he was your husband, and I played his part in the eyes of the passengers. It succeeded well." He laughed bitterly. "Lawrence was a guess," he added.

Then before her stricken eyes his recklessness fell from him. "Oh, if I could undo this," he said, "I would go back gladly to stand my chances of the gallows!"

A sob broke from her. "Hush," she said wildly. "Have you no mercy—none?"

"You must believe this," he went on passionately, "that at the last I loved you. You must believe that."

She shook her head almost deliriously.

"You must believe it," he repeated savagely. "If I could make you believe it, I would lie down to let you walk over me. You must believe that I have loved you as I have loved no other woman in my life—as I could love no other woman but you. You must believe that." He put out his hands as if to touch her, but she shrank away.

"No, no!" she cried. And she fled into the obscurity of the deck.

All that night she sat upon the edge of her berth. Her eyes were strained, and she stared blankly at the foam breaking against the porthole. Thought hung suspended, and she felt herself rocking mentally like a ship in open sea. She saw her future brought to bay before the threatening present, and she glanced furtively around in search of some byway of escape. The walls of the little stateroom seemed closing upon her, and she felt the upper berth bearing down. She sobbed convulsively. "It was so short," she said.

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