

felt more than ever sympathetic with him. When he saw her his face brightened and he came to her quickly.

'I say,' he exclaimed, 'this is no end of good luck. I had no idea you would be here. They told me the Earl was laid up with gout or something, and that you were nursing him. Have you any dances left for me?'

'A few, I think,' she answered, giving him her programme, and letting him scrawl his initials where he would.

'Thanks awfully,' he said, returning the card. 'I wanted so much to see you. The governor has been ragging me something awful. Good-bye for the present. I've got to hop with the Dalzell girl—the one with the freckles, you know. Her father owns the what-d'ye-call-'em mines in South Africa.'

Major Courtenay had looked on with a curious smile. When Jack was gone he said to Lady Flora: 'Have you known that young man long?'

'Yes; since he was a schoolboy. I've been a sort of elder sister to him. They've refused him for the army—isn't it a shame? I'm sure he'd fight until—'

'He was killed,' suggested Major Courtenay, quietly.

'Yes, of course,' she rejoined, hotly. 'He couldn't expect to fight after. And he can ride, too. He won a steeplechase last year at Mountbay. It isn't every soldier can do that.'

'I quite agree with you, it is not,' was the quiet reply.

Lady Flora looked at him indignantly and then drew herself up with her most dignified air. These middle-aged military men were too aggravating for words, they talked as if the universe belonged to them, and everybody in it.

The irresponsible ignorance of Jack Cavendish came as a welcome relief to her.

'I've had enough of dancing for the present,' he said, confidentially. 'Let's find a quiet corner and talk. I'm in no end of a fix, and you're the only one who understands. I don't think there's anyone in the little conservatory; in fact, I went there to see. You don't mind missing a waltz?'

'Not in the least,' she answered with a smile.

'Didn't the Dalzell girl dance well?'

'Don't talk about her,' he broke out. 'I want to talk about myself.'

'You always find yourself the most interesting topic of conversation,' she retorted. 'What have you been doing now?'

'Nothing,' he answered sullenly, 'and the governor has turned nasty—says I must do something or emigrate or buy a broom and sweep a crossing. I can't tell you all the nasty things he has said to me. That's the worst of being a poor man's son.'

'But why shouldn't you do something, Jack?' asked Lady Flora. 'Surely there are some things which you could do here.'

'You don't want me to go away, do you?' he said, suddenly looking into her face. 'We've been such good friends; I don't know what I should do without you. When I saw you amongst all those beastly people it was like a sunny day on the racecourse.'

Her heart beat more quickly. It was a doubtful compliment, but there was more sincerity and feeling in her voice than she had known before. Besides, he was a handsome boy and well groomed, and—well, she was a woman.

'I was glad to see you, too,' she said softly.

'Were you really?' he exclaimed, looking at her as she lay back behind the shelter of the palms. 'That was good of you. I always thought you regarded me as a boy.'

'But you are a man now,' she returned, 'and so you must think of doing something.'

'If I do something, will you too promise to do something for me?' he asked eagerly.

'Yes, if it is reasonable and possible. What do you want me to do?'

'To marry me, that's what I want,' he exclaimed.

'Hush,' she said. 'Some one may hear you.' He caught her in his arms and kissed her, and she made no resistance.

'Your love is all I want to make me a success,' he whispered. 'Only give me that and I will do anything that you wish.'

'Does it mean so much to you as that?' she asked, pushing him from her.

'Yes. Everything.'

'If it does I will marry you; but you must first find some position—'

'Yes, I will do that, darling,' he exclaimed, and would have kissed her again, but she rose from her seat.

'I have several engagements to fill,' she said with a smile, 'and so we must return.' She hesitated a moment and then added: 'But remember, my promise is only conditional, and you must not regard me as being engaged.'

They went back to the ballroom together. A curious little smile passed over Major Courtenay's face as he saw them.

Surely she won't be such a fool as to marry that boy,' he muttered to himself. Then he sighed, for the boy, after all, had what he himself never could win back despite his many distinctions—the priceless possession of youth. What were military distinctions to a young and beautiful woman, when handicapped by fifty years? He watched them jealously. The boy was radiant and eager; the woman's manner was gentle and a little embarrassed.

'I'll talk with the governor to-morrow about a job, and then I'll come and tell you,' Jack whispered, pressing Lady Flora's finger.

Lady Flora did not mention to her father the arrangement she had made with Jack Cavendish. She knew in her heart that the Earl would not approve of such a marriage for his youngest daughter. But after all he himself was responsible, since he had reminded her of the big gap which lay between her and her girlhood. If she waited longer she must inevitably fall back upon such a husband as Major Courtenay, whose best years had been given to his profession and to whom a wife would be but the consolation of his old age. If she had been as wise at eighteen as she now was at twenty-seven things would be different.

One afternoon, a few days after Lady Windle's ball, Jack Cavendish presented himself at Lord Mountbay's town house.

He was obviously excited when he took Lady Flora's hand, and would have kissed her if she had not drawn back.

'I say,' he said, with an aggrieved air, 'I thought we were—'

'But we are not,' she interrupted quietly. 'Have you got any news?'

'Yes. I've talked the whole thing over with the governor. Never mentioned you, of course,' he explained. 'He was quite pleased about my anxiety to find a job. So we put our heads together.'

'With what result?' asked Lady Flora, for it was Jack's way to think he had done a thing when he talked of doing it, and she was under no illusions respecting him.

'There's an awfully good job vacant now,' he answered, 'the Secretaryship of the new Fishery Board, worth thirteen hundred a year, and very little to do except in the way of administrative work. Just the thing to suit me. The clerks and fellows like that will do all the real work.'

'I see,' responded Lady Flora. 'But how are you to get it?'

'Well, that's the question,' said Jack, his ardor a little damped. 'You see, it's in the gift of the Duke of Billborough, the President of the Council, you know. Now, how can we wirepull him? Do you know anyone to work the Duke?'

Lady Flora's face flushed, remembering how her father, a few days before, had told her of Ronald Gower's appointment, as Clerk of the Council. He was the only one whom she knew who was likely to influence the Duke, but how could she ask a favor of the lover whom she had rejected for the lover whom she was prepared to accept? It was a painful dilemma.

'Do what you can yourself,' she answered, 'and meanwhile I will think what I can do.'

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