

Nervous exhaustion and the quiet caress in his voice weakened Gloria's resistance till she found equal difficulty in preserving her resentment and in keeping her lips steady.

"You always say you know me so well," she reminded him as she laid a cold hand over aching eyes.

The light, filtering between her fingers, grew suddenly brighter as he moved noiselessly from the window to her side.

"You want the ordinary things," she heard. "You want to be loved . . . and you want to love in return. You want your children. You want success." . . .

"I don't seem to get what I want."

"It's all there, waiting for you to take it."

"I get no happiness from your love when you share it with other people. And I don't think I'd have mentioned children if I'd been you, Freddie. . . . Success? I didn't see why down-fifth-rate people should always take the lead. . . . I've learned that these things require time!"

"If you're thinking of Newbridge, there's no rivalry to speak of in that quarter."

For the first time the facile caress of his voice failed to soothe her. In a second flash of illumination, she realized that Margery succeeded always where she failed. Born rich and brought up in shelter, she soured the wine which Gloria had to drink. It was Margery who had married and consoled the man she loved, Margery who stole the honour for which she had worked, Margery who controlled the courses of nature and had a son for no better reason than that she wanted one. And it was Margery, in the last contest, whose fresher charms had been preferred to her own.

"There's no rivalry between an ant and an elephant," Gloria cried.

"You're in undisputed possession. . . . Sweetheart, you make a bargain? I won't let you go, because I need you too badly; and you won't want to go if we make a success of our life. But you must help me! Whatever you want in life is waiting for you. Norman isn't going to make a scandal; he knows . . . and you know . . . and I know. . . . We shall have very little of them. . . . Will you make that bargain, Gloria?"

5

As she sat without answering, Freddie bent over her and lifted her into his arms. A futile memory of old rescues taken when her brain was less torpid, her body less chilled,