

"Aunt Rebecca never struck me as a molly-coddler. I always considered her a tolerably cynical old Spartan. But do you mean there is any doubt of their going? Awfully good of you to wait to see if they don't go, but I'm sure Aunt Rebecca wouldn't want you to sacrifice your section—"

Mrs. Melville lifted a shapely hand in a Del-sartian gesture of arrest; her smiling words were the last the colonel had expected. "Hush, dear Bertie; Aunt Rebecca doesn't *know* I am going. I don't want her to know until we are on the train."

"Oh, I see, a surprise?" But he did *not* see; and, with a quiet intentness, he watched the color rattle Mrs. Melville's smooth cheeks.

"Hardly," returned the lady. "The truth is, Bertie, Melville and I are worried about Aunt Rebecca. She, we fear, has fallen under the influence of a most plausible adventuress; I suppose you have heard of her companion, Miss Smith?"

"Can't say I have exactly," said the colonel placidly, but his eyes narrowed again. "Who is the lady?"

"I thought—I am *sure* Melville must have written you. But— Oh, yes, he wrote yesterday