

coronet of her hair to the seductive curves of her mouth and chin that made such tender atonement for the cool directness of her eyes.

Still she did not move; but her lips parted in a small sigh, and the spell was broken. Mark rose and planted himself before her.

"Miss Alison," he began—and could get no further.

"Well?" she asked with that distracting lift of her lashes. "Is the precious tackle out of gear?"

Her coolness almost angered him and gave him sudden command of his tongue. "*Tackle?* D'you really suppose I came out here to catch trout?"

"You said so last night. And you seemed to be making elaborate arrangements——"

"So I was—to get half an hour alone with you," he announced bluntly, and saw the ghost of a blush creep up under her skin. He wanted simply to take her in his arms without more ado. Instead, he sat down close to the rock, plunged his hands in the heather, and leaned towards her.

"I was trying to tell you last night. Didn't you understand?"

"N-no. I thought the music and—the sentiment had rather carried you away."

"It was *you* who carried me away. The music was a kind of safety-valve, that's all." He leaned still nearer. "Bel—is there a ghost of a chance for me? Is it sheer conceit and impertinence on my part to ask—so soon?"

"No—oh no." And suddenly she covered her face as if the intensity of his gaze affected her like strong sunlight.

He was silent a moment, watching her and crushing the heather in his fingers. Then, very gently, he laid a hand on her knee.

"What is it? Tell me. I *must* know."

At that she dropped her hands. By chance or