

away. You have driven me in here. And I can't get away from you. You won't even let me be alone."

"I dare not let you be alone to-night."

"Why not? What are you afraid of? What does it matter to you where I go or what I do? Don't say it matters! Don't dare to say that!"

Her voice was fierce now.

"It doesn't matter to anybody, except perhaps a little to Vere, and a very little to Gaspere. It never has really mattered to anybody. I thought it did once to some one. I thought I knew it did. But I was wrong. It didn't. It never mattered."

As she spoke an immense, a terrific feeling of desolation poured over her, as if from above, coming down upon her in the dark. It was like a flood that stiffened into ice upon her, making her body and her soul numb for a moment.

"I've never mattered to any one."

She muttered the words to herself. As she did so, Artois seemed again to be looking into the magic mirror of the *fattura della morte*, to see the pale man, across whose face the shadow of a palm-leaf shifted, turning on his bed towards a woman who stood by an open door.

"You have always mattered to me," he said.

As he spoke there was in his voice that peculiar ring of utter sincerity which can no more be simulated, or mistaken, than the ringing music of sterling gold. But perhaps she was not in a condition to hear rightly, or perhaps something within her chose to deny, had a lust for denial because denial hurt her.

"To you least of all," she said. "Only yourself has ever really mattered to you."

In a sentence she summed up the long catalogue that had been given to him by her silence.

His whole body felt as if it reddened. His skin tingled with a sort of physical anger. His mature pride, that had grown always, as a strong man's natural pride does grow with the passing of the years, seemed to him instinctively to rush forward to return the blow that had been dealt it.

"That is not quite true," he said.

"It is true. I have always had copper and I have always wanted gold," she answered.

He controlled himself, to prove to himself that she lied, that he was not the eternal egoist she dubbed him. Sometimes he had been genuinely unselfish, sometimes—not often, perhaps, but sometimes—he had really sunk himself in her. She was not being quite just. But how could she be quite just to-night? And what did exact justice matter to-night? An almost reckless feeling overtook him, a desire to conquer at all costs