

"You are quite sure of that?" she said.

"The wish to do so was almost irresistible the first time I saw you. It has been growing stronger ever since."

Jacinta laughed softly, though the crimson was in her cheeks. "Still, you would have mastered it. You were always discreet, you know, and that was why at last I—who have hitherto told all my friends what they ought to do—had to let some one else make it clear how much I wanted you. Now, you are going to think very little of me after that?"

"My dear," said Austin, "you know there was only one thing which could have kept me away from you."

"As if that mattered," said Jacinta laughed scornfully. "Now, stoop a little, though, perhaps, I shouldn't tell you, and if you hadn't gone to Africa, of course, I shouldn't have done it. I knew when you went away how badly I wanted you—and I would have done anything to bring you back, however much it cost me."

A couple of seamen carrying baggage appeared from behind the deck-house just then, which naturally cut short their confidences, and Austin made his way with Jacinta's hand upon his arm towards the boat. He was a trifle bewildered, as well as exultant, for this was quite a new Jacinta. In fact, he had never encountered before. She gave him another proof of it when he made an observation that afforded her the opening as they were rowed across the harbour.

"No," she said, quite disregarding Mrs. Hatherly, "I am not going to give you any advice or instructions now you belong to me. After managing everybody else's affairs successfully for ever so long I made a deplorable mess of my own, you see."

"Then what am I to do when we have difficulties to