

—what would she not do to help him, to serve his interests? What had she not done since she married! Her fortune, it was his; her every waking hour had been filled with something devised to help him on his way. Had he ever said to her: "Hylde, you are a help to me"? He had admired her—but was he singular in that? Before she married there were many—since, there had been many—who had shown, some with tact and carefulness, others with a crudeness making her shudder, that they admired her; and, if they might, would have given their admiration another name with other manifestations. Had she repelled it all? She had been too sure of herself to draw her skirts about her; she was too proud to let any man put her at any disadvantage. She had been safe, because her heart had been untouched. The Duchess of Snowdon, once beautiful, but now with a face like a mask, enamelled and rouged and lifeless, had said to her once: "My dear, I ought to have died at thirty. When I was twenty-three I wanted to squeeze the orange dry in a handful of years, and then go out suddenly, and let the dust of forgetfulness cover my bones. I had one child, a boy, and would have no more; and I squeezed the orange! But I didn't go at thirty, and yet the orange was dry. My boy died; and you see what I am—a fright, I know it; and I dress like a child of twenty; and I can't help it."

There had been moments, once, when Hylde, too, had wished to squeeze the orange dry, but something behind, calling to her, had held her back. She had dropped her anchor in perilous seas, but it had never dragged.

"Tell me how to make friends—and keep them," she added gaily.

"If it be true I make friends, thee taught me how,"