

pretty, youthful vivacity, and she looked tired.

When Walworth finally made his way to her, Helen was in the centre of a tiny court, and apparently in her blitheliest mood.

"I am sorry I missed you when you came down," he said, apologetically. "It was very stupid of me, and bars me out from growling because I lost my first waltz."

"I was a little late myself."

She was glad to hear the orchestra start again, and they went in. Not for worlds would Dick know that anything troubled her—at least not yet.

It seemed an interminable time before they were once more in the launches and speeding down the quiet river toward home.

Cecily Winton had nestled beside her, and presently laid her hand half shyly on Helen's for a moment.

When Helen came down to breakfast the next morning the light shadows of sleeplessness lay around her eyes.

As they left the table, scattering in a half dozen directions, Helen would have slipped away, but Walworth followed her to the foot of the stairs.

"Will you be ready pretty soon?" It was their custom to start off for a ramble each morning, and it was too well understood to need any preliminary invitation.

"In about half an hour, I think." "Thanks. Don't be too long. It's my last morning, you know, and I am privileged to be selfish."

He patted her arm lightly, it seemed to her sympathetically, and certainly he was very serious for Dick. She excused herself quickly, went to her room and propped his picture in front of her, staring at it miserably.

"Do you love her, Dick? You might have told me before this. It is a poor sort of loyalty, to blindfold those who love you. Better hurt once and have it over with."

She turned away toward the window, looking listlessly out at the wide, flowing river, bright in the sunshine, and the cool stretches of woods.

"She won't let him tell me, and the burden of it lies with me,—unless—unless I want to hold him, against his will. Do I love him well enough to give him up?"

She put the picture away, covering it from sight, and put on her hat. In the sleepless watches of the night she had reached a decision, a hard decision, and she must have it over before her courage failed.

ion, and she must have it over before her courage failed.

On her way she passed Cecily's door, and by one of those impulses which make us drive the knife a little deeper into our own wounds, and give it an extra twist or two, she stopped and rapped lightly.

"Oh!" she said in a little startled gasp, and turned suddenly pink. "I thought you were mother," she added lamely. "Please come in."

Cecily's evident confusion and her own hurt chilled Helen into unwonted formality.

"No, I thank you. I merely stopped to see if you were better."

"Oh, yes. I shall be down presently. It's very kind of you."

The bend of Miss Meredith's head was at once an adieu and a polite disclaimer of any obligations. She hated herself that she could be hard against such a child, and as she went she carried with her a teasing recollection of a flushed and wistful face, watching her departure from the open door.

During the ramble with Walworth she touched lightly on fifty topics, flitting from one to another with mystifying swiftness, to keep away from the borderland of the personal.

"Dick, do you remember our compact?" "What compact?" Dick was taken unawares.

"About our engagement. That if either of us ever tired, we would be honest about it and ask to be released?"

"Yes, I remember." Dick laughed a little. "I seem to recollect getting into disgrace by making fun of it."

"But don't you think it is right?" she insisted. Her parasol hid her face, but the hand that held it was cold. Dick seemed inclined to dismiss the question.

"Oh yes, but like most theories, it is a little over-developed on one side. It does very well for a woman. It is her eternal privilege to dismiss a man if she wants to, but no man who is a man can tell a woman a thing like that without feeling like a very small, yellow pup."

"Is it better for them to marry, one deceived and the other unsatisfied?" "Isn't this a bit weighty for a warm day?" Dick laughed again, but dropped quickly back to seriousness.

"I'm afraid it isn't so much what it is better to do as what we have the courage to do. Don't you think we might talk about the weather, Nell?"

Helen stripped a spray from a bush in passing, and crushed it absently in her fingers. She had given him his chance, and he had not taken it. He had practically admitted that it was because he could not bring himself to it. Her face was still obscured by the parasol. When she spoke her voice was not entirely steady.

"Don't you understand, Dick?" "Don't I understand what? Look here, Nell, what do you mean?"

She turned slowly and faced him, flushing and paling again, but the rebellious voice was under control.

"I mean that I have made a mistake. Recently—I have found it out. I ask you to give me my freedom."

They were in full sight of the house, and Perry Knowlton was swinging down the path to meet them. Dick flushed dully. He was struggling to comprehend it, and drew in his breath shortly as he realized that she meant all that her words signified.

"Will you tell me why?" he began constrainedly.

"I cannot. Please do not ask me." Down the path Knowlton's voice came cheerily.

"It's time you came home! Everybody has run off and left me, and there isn't a blessed thing to do."

The ordeal of lunch was more than Helen could stand. She shut herself in her room and lay with throbbing head, trying to decide whether she had been rash, or cruel, or kind. She knew her words had been curt, but she could not have brought herself to explain. There was something humili-

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