

very tall and white as she loomed above him, "but you can make no difference in the stand I take."

She turned as if to leave him, at which, with a single bound, he gained his feet.

"You've taken the whole thing wrong," he panted. "It ain't that I'm pitying and protecting you,—I'm *willing* now to be wed."

"That then must be the parting of our ways," Mary said simply, "for I am *not* willing."

"But wait there—now listen, Miss Mary," he cried with a clutch on a slender ebon sleeve. "My poor head's going around, like a hive when the wood-smoke's starting. Give me a minute for to hook myself back to place. You cain't go off and leave me in this franzy. Think of our years of love."

"Yes, I am thinking of all those years of friendship," that strange, most reasonable of women said, with a quiet smile; "and because of the precious years, I am still going to ask you to serve me."

"What's it?" he breathed, a great relief making his tense face gentler. "Anything in this world that you can ask."

"Then, Chris," she told him, meanwhile gently removing the big shaking hand that clutched her arm, "I am going to beg you to stop—for at least six months—coming here at all."

"Stop coming—*here!*" he echoed, not quite believing. "Stop seeing you and Blessing every day?"