

his opportunity, and pointed out—like Mr. Brownrigg—that my logic was irresistible, and that it was impossible to forbid my appearing on the boards if Sibyl was to be allowed to go behind the counter. A recent slump in Kaffirs had fostered economical impulses, I suppose. Anyhow, if I surrender the stage conditionally, my parent will keep his money in his pocket."

"Won't Sibyl Limited get it somewhere else?"

"She thinks she will, and my brother thinks so, no doubt. But will they? Perhaps you know about those things. I don't."

"I know little or nothing," said Challis. "But I understand that the chief point is settled. You won't play Estrild." There was no affectation of unconcern in his manner now.

The two walked on together along the river-brink of Trout Bend in silence; until, leaving the river, a path, winding through scattered gorse and fern, brought them in sight of the picnic party in the shade of a great beech, the vanguard of the deep woods beyond. Then Judith stopped and said: "I suppose you are angry with me?"

To which Challis replied, with vexation in his voice: "I could have forgiven you more than that." Said as a politeness this speech would have meant, "That is a mighty small matter to forgive you for." Said with a gasp, or something like it, it meant, to Judith's ears, that she had been winding that skein—this man's life, you see!—too quickly round her finger. He might become embarrassing.

"You will find another Estrild," she said. An attempt at a laugh failed, and its failure was worse than its omission would have been.

"I shall not try," said he. And then his evil genius saw his chance, and made Alfred Challis conceive that he could, for the release of his soul, make a false fetch of what he would have liked to say, in terms of a parallel line of thought. "I care little or nothing for the play for its own sake. My interest was in your presentation of the leading part." The words were safe, so far as they went—might have been spoken to a male actor who had taken another engagement. But he could not leave it there. That Evil Genius must needs make him go on speaking, with more