

T H E W I L D O L I V E

her pure heart? It was enough to satisfy men with far greater claims than he had ever put forth, and far more pretension than he had ever dreamed of cherishing. The Wise Man supplied him with two or three phrases of reply—neat little phrases, that would have bound her forever, and yet saved his self-esteem. He turned them over in his mind and on his tongue, trying to add a touch of glamour while he kept them terse. He could feel the Wise Man fidgeting impatiently, just as he could feel her flaming, expectant eyes upon him; and still he toyed with the small silver object aimlessly, conscious of a certain bitter joy in his soul's suspense. He had not yet looked up, nor polished the Wise Man's phrases to his taste, when a footman threw the door open, and Norrie Ford himself walked in.

The meeting was saved from awkwardness chiefly by Ford's own lack of embarrassment. As he crossed the room and shook hands, first with Miriam, then with Conquest, there was a subdued elation in his manner and glance that reduced small considerations to nothing.

"No; I won't sit down," he explained, hurriedly, and not without excitement, "because I only looked in for a minute. I've got a cab waiting for me outside. The fact is, I ran in to say good-bye."

"Good-bye?" Miriam questioned.

"Not for long, I hope. I'm off—to give myself up."

"But why to-night?" Conquest asked. "What's the rush?"

"Only that I want to get my word in first. They've got their eye on me. I thought it yesterday, and I know it to-day. I want them to see that I'm not afraid of them, and so I'm asking their hospitality for to-night. I've got my bag in the cab, and everything ship-shape. I couldn't