

part from him without rendering some account of stewardship. But to-night, between thoughts of Marjorie's desire of his wife, and an inspiring review of his exhibition in *Le Temps*, by Leseppes, he was not in the mood. Moreover, he had all the Englishman's distaste for interposition, however legitimate, between man and wife.

But as he rose Sir Lakshman put out a detaining hand. "You will spare me another fifteen minutes, Nevil. There is a matter, not yet freely spoken of between us, that has been on my mind all day."

Politely repressing a sigh, Nevil sat down again and prepared to light a cigarette. "Very well, sir; if it will not take too long. Lilamani's waiting up for me, and she is tired."

"That I know too well. And it is because of that, because every day she is seeming a little more tired—that I must ask you plainly, before leaving—is your heart satisfied about her? Mine is not."

Nevil frowned thoughtfully at his empty coffee-cup, recalling his talk with Broome. This man had twice tried to speak; and yet . . . Nevil felt perversely restrained under the Indian's look and tone.

"She is in a very poor state of health," he answered with studied quietness, "or we should not be here. Are you implying anything else?"

"No need to waste time in implying. My child's welfare and happiness are more than my own. I am troubled and uncertain about many things; and only straight talk will serve."

Nevil inclined his head. "You shall have straight answers, I promise you. About her health I am as worried as yourself. It's the one grave drawback——"

"And you think to make it right by a few months on the Mediterranean?" the other put in quickly. "That is where you mistake. I know that specialist of London said