

the blues. How about the drinking? And what was the final understanding, after refusals followed by confidences?"

The hand that rested on her knee moved in a slow, soothing caress. "I'm afraid you won't approve. Ralph didn't. But I overruled him. He—Mr. Seldon—begged me so hard not to throw him over altogether that I said he might write once a month. But the thing that arrives is more like an intimate diary than a letter. He *can* write, Mums. And he isn't drinking—like he was. That was part of the compact. It began in a bad cholera season: no one to notice; no one to care. He says the average man never realises, till he has to spend months alone, that what he calls the voice of his conscience is much more often the voice of other people's! So now—I'm his 'other people'! He gave me his word and he writes quite honestly about it. If ever he really slips back again he says he'll stop writing and chuck everything.—There! That's my poor little tale, I'm happier now it's out. You may scold me; but you'd have done just the same yourself!"

For answer, Lady Forsyth put both arms round her and kissed her fervently. "Be as angelic as you please to your poor things, darling," she said. "But for heaven's sake don't marry them."

"I couldn't," Sheila answered softly. "I'd sooner—go without."

In the silence that followed Lady Forsyth felt as if the girl must hear her vehement thoughts. But very soon Sheila spoke again.

"I told Mr. Seldon about our little colony of arts and crafts, and he is ever so interested. He says machinery's gaining ground fearfully fast in India; cheapening and speeding up everything and killing the craftsman's joy in his work, just as it's done over here. I had a letter yesterday. He enclosed some Indian designs for carving. I *must* show you."