

no other living person could have known, the effort it must have cost him to speak as he had just spoken.

"That, at any rate, is the exact truth."

"I know it is."

"I have thought myself clear-sighted, Hermione. I have studied others. Just lately I have been forced to study myself. It is as if—it seems to me as if events had conspired against my own crass ignorance of myself, as if a resolve had been come to by the Power that directs our destinies that I should know myself. I wish I dared to tell you more. I wish to-night I dared to tell you all that I have come to know. But I dare not, I dare not. You would not believe me. I could not even expect you to believe me."

He stopped. Perhaps he hoped for a word that would deny his last observation. But it did not come to him. And he hesitated for what seemed to him a very long time, almost an eternity. He was beset by indecision, by an extraordinary deep modesty and consciousness of his own unworthiness that he had never before experienced, and also by a new and acute consciousness of the splendour of Hermione's nature, of the power of her heart, of the faithfulness and nobility of her temperament.

"All I can say, Hermione,"—he at length went on speaking, and in his voice sounded that strange modesty, a modesty that made his voice seem to her almost like a voice of hesitating youth,—
—"all that I dare to say to-night is this. I told you just now that we all have our different ways of loving. You have loved in your way. You have loved Delarey as your husband. And you have loved me as your friend. Delarey as your husband betrayed you. Only to-day you know it. I, as your friend—have I ever betrayed you? Do you believe—even now when you are ready to believe very much of evil—do you really believe that as a friend I could ever betray you?"

He moved, stood in front of her, lifted his hands and laid them on her shoulders.

"Do you believe that?"

"No."

"You have loved us in your way. He is dead. But I am here to love you always in my way. Perhaps my way seems to you such a poor way—it must, it must—that it is hardly worth anything at all. But perhaps, now that I know so much of myself—and of you—" there was a slight break in his voice—
"and of you, I shall be able to find a different, a better way. I don't know. To-night I doubt myself. I feel as if I were so unworthy. But I may—I may be able to find a better way of loving you."

Quite unconsciously his two hands, which still rested upon