

CHAPTER IV

"I am of a . age with each. What matter if my hair turns grey ? "
SIR RABINDRANATH TAGORE.

THAT radiant day of summer, all too short for Mark, taxed to the utmost his mother's impatient spirit that could bear any ill better than the ache of suspense, sharpened by premonition of the worst. Mark's off-hand manner of announcing the day's programme to the breakfast-table in general confirmed her own secret fear. And if he were really crazy enough to speak, the result was a foregone conclusion. She would be asked to love, as a daughter, this alien girl, of whom she knew nothing except that she was not the real mate of the real Mark.

At the thought, a horrid sense of helplessness overwhelmed her. Open opposition would be worse than futile: yet smiling acquiescence was beyond her. Truth of intercourse—finest of all fine arts—was, for both mother and son, a necessity of their natures. To it they owed that deeper intimacy not often attained between one generation and another; but, in the present dilemma, it would make things so much harder for them both that dread almost outweighed her longing for his return.

Breakfast ended, Ralph announced his intention of carrying both girls off for a long walk. Keith retired to the study with the *Scotsman* and a formidable pile of correspondence, leaving Helen to her own devices. Nothing she liked better, in normal circumstances; for her devices were many and