

## THE FRUIT OF THE TREE

"No—she never told me."

It was best so, after all. She understood that now. It was now at last that she was paying her full price.

Amherst rolled up the plan with a sigh and pushed it into the drawer of the table. It struck her that he too had the look of one who has laid a ghost. He turned to her and drew her hand through his arm.

"You're tired, dear. You ought to have driven back with the others," he said.

"No, I would rather stay with you "

"You want to drain this good day to the dregs, as I do?"

"Yes," she murmured, drawing her hand away.

"It *is* a good day, isn't it?" he continued, looking about him at the white-panelled walls, the vista of large bright rooms seen through the folding doors. "I feel as if we had reached a height, somehow—a height where one might pause and draw breath for the next climb. Don't you feel that too, Justine?"

"Yes—I feel it."

"Do you remember once, long ago—one day when you and I and Cicely went on a picnic to hunt orchids—how we got talking of the one best moment in life—the moment when one wanted most to stop the clock?"

The colour rose in her face while he spoke. It was a long time since he had referred to the early days of their friendship—the days *before*. . .