

debt of honour between two men who are my all in all. Don't you see—won't you see—the bitterness of my humiliation?"

"Indeed I do," he said slowly. "But the die is cast—the debt is there, and must be paid."

"Yes; and until it is, I must not see Harry as a lover, and we can be no more than friends." She paced the room restlessly. "In a way, I am glad it has happened now. The thought of leaving you has troubled me exceedingly—has been the one flaw in my happiness. I seem to feel you need my help. This curse of the Derings seems to be eating your life away, and, even now, it threatens mine. My dear papa, whom so many love and admire, why should there be this ghastly blot on your life and reflected on mine? As long as it is a Dering weakness, I ought to be at your side. I loathe the prospect of leaving you more at this minute because I now know my lover is tainted with the same mad curse. I am a gambler's daughter by the accident of birth, but I should hesitate to be a gambler's bride by deliberate choice."

Sir John watched her speaking rebelliously from her eager young heart. He saw his instincts in the light of her still grey eyes. As he looked, something vital in his life, which he had wasted, stirred his very soul—a message from the youth he had lost. Taking her hand, and holding it between his own fine, nervous fingers, he saw again a woman he had learnt to love and sworn to respect—a woman whose last words breathed his name; a woman whose every day had been spent in the shadow of his protection, and whose trust in him had never been betrayed.

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