

THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE 333

He sank limply into a chair. His companion's heart was freezing.

"Be calm, old friend. She shall be sent for at once."

"Break it to her gently, Veath, break it to her gently," murmured Hugh.

Veath excused himself and left the room. In the hall, out of Hugh's sight, he stopped, clenched his hands, closed his eyes and shivered as if his blood had turned to ice. Presently he returned to the room, having gone no farther than the hall.

"I have sent for her," he said in a strange voice.

Grace was coming down stairs when Veath admitted Hugh. Startled and almost completely prostrated, she fell back, where Veath found her when he went to announce the news. Finally, with throbbing heart, she crept to the curtain that hung in the door between the parlors and peered through at the two men. Ridgeway was standing in the centre of the room, nervously handling a book that lay on the table. His face was white and haggard; his tall, straight figure was stooped and lifeless. Veath stood on the opposite side of the table, just as pale and just as discomposed.

"Does she often speak of me?" she heard Hugh ask hoarsely. The other did not answer at once.

"Frequently, Hugh, of course," he said finally.

"And—do—you—think she—she loves me as much as ever?" There was fear in his voice: but poor Grace could only distinguish pathetic eagerness. Veath was silent, his hands clasped behind his back, his throat