

His cheerful boyish face assumed a proper solemnity of expression, and a certain nobility. At the moment he really thought that nobody in the world cared what became of him.

"Nobody," said Barbara, "likes to back a flighty pony. You yourself, for instance, are always putting money, your own or some one else's, on horses that always run somewhere near form. Of course you have excuses for yourself."

"I? None."

"Oh, yes, you have. You were brought up to be rich, and you were left poor, and a man has to live and even secure for himself the luxuries to which he has been accustomed. Haven't you ever excused yourself to yourself something like that?"

Wilmot admitted that he had, and went further. "You can't knock livings out of a tree with a stick like ripe apples," he said. "You've either got to use your wits or begin at the bottom and work up. And it seems to me that I'd rather be a little bit tarnished than toil away the best years of my life the way some men I know are doing."

"Yes," said Barbara, "but why not go somewhere where the world is younger, and there are real chances to be a man, and real opportunities to make money in real ways? I don't blame you for living on your wits. I blame you for gambling and never getting anywhere and not caring."

"Not caring? And this from you?"

She changed color under his steady eyes.