

T H E W I L D O L I V E

wife—long ago—I told you there were certain conditions I could never fulfil—and you waived them. On that ground I'm ready to meet all your wishes, and make you a good wife to the utmost of my power. I'm eager to do it—because I honor and respect you as women don't always honor and respect the very men they love. I've told Norrie Ford, and I repeat it to you, that after seeing him go free and restored to his place among men, the most ardent desire of my life is to make you happy. I'm perfectly true; I'm perfectly sincere. What more can you ask of me?"

He looked at her searchingly, while he thought hard and rapidly. He could not complain that the bars were up and the blinds drawn any longer. On the contrary, she had let him see into the recesses of her life with a clarity that startled him, as pure truth startles often. As he sat musing, his pretence at cynicism fell from him, together with something of his furbished air of youth. She saw him grow graver, grayer, older, under her very eyes, and was moved with compunction—with compassion. Her face still aglow and her hands clasped in her lap, she leaned to him across the table, speaking in the rich, low voice that always thrilled him.

"What I feel for you is . . . something so much like . . . love . . . that you would never have known the difference . . . if you hadn't wrung it from me."

Though he toyed aimlessly with some small silver object on the table and did not look up, her words sent a tremor through his frame. The Wise Man within him was very eloquent, repeating again and again the sentence she herself had used a minute or two ago: What more could he ask of her? What more *could* he ask of her, indeed, after this assurance right out of the earnestness and honesty of