

Then very abruptly Bunny opened his eyes. "No, you wouldn't!" he said unexpectedly.

"Indeed I would!" she said very earnestly.

"You wouldn't!" he reiterated, with the paralysing conviction that refuses to hear any reasoning. "If you would, you'd have married Lord Saltash years ago, and been rich enough to pay one of the big men to put me right."

She winced sharply. "Bunny! You're not to talk to me of Lord Saltash. It isn't kind. He is the one man in the world I—couldn't marry."

"Rot!" said Bunny. "You know you're in love with him."

"I know I couldn't marry him," she said, a piteous quiver in her voice. "It is cruel to—to—" She broke off.

"All right," said Bunny, waiving the point. "Find some other rich man, then! I don't care who it is. You'll have to pretty soon. We shall neither of us stand this Sheppard person for long."

"If I could only—somehow—make a living for the two of us!" the girl said.

"You can't!" Again deadly conviction swept aside argument. "You're not clever enough, and you haven't time—unless you propose to leave me to the tender mercies of the Sheppard. It would be a quick way out of the difficulty so far as I am concerned, anyway."

"Of course I could never leave you!" Maud said quickly.

"All right, then. Marry—and be quick about it!" said Bunny.

He turned his drawn, white face to the window—a face of unconscious pathos that often stirred his sister to the depths. Youth—and the gladness of youth—had never existed for Bunny Brian. Life for so long as he could remember had always been a long, dreary round of pain and disappointment, of restless nights and dragging, futile days. Only Maud, who shared them all, knew to the uttermost the woeful bitterness of the lad's existence. It hurt her cruelly, that bitterness, moving her to a perpetual self-sacrifice, of the extent of which even Bunny had small conception.

She identified herself completely with him, and had so done since the tenth year of her life, when he had come—a puny, wailing baby—into the world to fill the void of her childish heart. She had, as it were, grown up in his service,