

And hurting you every time he gives a fresh tug ? A fine exhibition of masculine selfishness ! ”

“ Mums, he doesn’t realise it hurts. And—he has so much against him : if you only knew—— ”

“ Well, I *want* to know. ” Pushing aside her manuscript she drew a low stool close to her chair, and Sheila settled down on it, with a small sigh of content.

“ Now tell me. What has he against him ? ”

“ Loneliness and poor health ; and an ugly little desert station at the end of nowhere ; and hating the country—and—and drink ! ”

“ Darling ! You’ve outdone yourself this time ! ”

Sheila turned quickly. “ *Please* stop bothering about me, and be sorry for him. You would be, if you’d seen him. So worn and sallow ; though he’s barely thirty. Clever—very. Too many brains and too few convictions, I used to tell him. And then, there had been a girl—when he was home on his first leave. She made violent friends with him : drew him on till he lost his heart to her ; only to find that she had deliberately used him as a stalking-horse for another man, who afterwards turned out to be married already. He heard that she went off with him in spite of it, but *that* he can’t believe. A dismal tale, isn’t it ? The trouble was he couldn’t stop loving her, even though he knew she was worthless—— ”

“ Until he found in my beautiful Sheila the privileged bit of sticking-plaster to mend his heart ! ” Lady Forsyth interrupted her with a touch of heat. “ I wonder he had the face to tell you—— ”

“ He didn’t tell me till I’d refused him—twice. Then we had a long talk and he poured out all his bottled-up miseries. And I wasn’t *only* a bit of sticking-plaster. He’d already stopped loving her. Do be fair to him, Dearest. You’re in a wicked mood to-day ! ”

“ I’ve never been in a worse. And the tale of your latest ‘ poor thing ’ isn’t exactly a specific for