

think there is likely to be a violent friendship between you and Miss Redfern?"

"Not exactly," she replied, "we barely managed to be civil to each other."

"I ought to have been here to see the fun," he said gaily, adding, "and what of the old dowager?"

"Oh, she helped to keep the peace. She wouldn't be so bad if she were a little less frivolous and a little more refined; but you must go and dress now, or you will be late."

He drew his arm away reluctantly and went, but he was away no longer than he could help, hastening back to her side as soon as he could.

When they were alone at the dinner-table she looked up and asked in emphasised accents: "Is it a fact that Jack was very friendly with the Redferns?"

"Yes, why?"

"Because Miss Redfern spoke of him in a most familiar way, and I can't imagine Jack taking to a girl like that."

"He was always susceptible to a pretty face," answered Guy. "Also they are very go-ahead people, and give very good entertainments. Probably he met other friends at their house. Poor old Jack was a terrible flirt."

"Oh, no! I don't think so," she said hurriedly. "It was only his way of joking with everyone, and, of course, the girls all made a good deal of him."

Guy smiled a little. He thought he was more likely to know than she, but he did not say so.

"Did he go to see them often?" she continued.

"Once a week, I daresay."

"Once a week," she repeated in surprise, adding, "how is it they don't know you better? I thought you and Jack were inseparable."

"Except in that particular."

"What particular?"

"I never had a partiality for ladies' company. He used to go on those sorts of expeditions with some other friend."

There was a slight pause, then, looking hard at her, he said: "Until I met my wife, I never cared for any lady's company, but I cannot have enough of hers."

She coloured slightly but did not meet his eyes. "You are getting quite clever at pretty speeches," she remarked, somewhat cynically. "What a pity they should not be more appreciated."

He bit his lip with sudden vexation and replied sarcastically, "Yes, it is a pity they should be wasted."

She raised her eyebrows, with a slightly disdainful air, which aggravated him a little more.

"I wonder if you looked like that when Jack said pretty things to you," he said, recklessly.

She regarded him stonily for a moment, then remarked coldly, "Comparisons are odious."

They had finished the meal, and pushing his chair away impatiently, he rose and walked to the window, saying as he did so, "It's very hard upon me

that Jack should be always first. I believe you never think of anyone else at all."

"Not in any comparison, I admit."

"And do you think it's fair?" he asked, in a voice of stifled indignation. "Surely I am entitled to the first place occasionally."

"You are forgetting something, I fancy," she said, half bitterly, beginning to get roused also. "I told you from the first I had no heart to give you. I have tried to study your wishes and please you in most things. I am sorry if I have failed."

"Tried to study my wishes," he said, in a tone whose bitterness rivalled hers. "I am sorry you should have had to make such an effort on my account."

She looked so lovely in her pure white dress as she stood before him, with stately grace; her very presence exercised a magnetic influence over him, and the cold expression of her eyes only maddened him.

"I think this discussion is needless, and borders on the ridiculous," she said haughtily; "you have apparently forgotten the understanding between us?"

"No, but I hate it!" he exclaimed, adding hastily, "but you are right, we border on the ridiculous, and I am the fool," with which he strode past her, out of the room.

Half-an-hour afterwards he sought her again; but though his face was once more calm, it did not wear his usual careless, light-hearted expression.

"I'm awfully sorry I was so foolish just now, Madge," he said frankly. "I hope you are not vexed."

"Oh, it didn't matter," she said, "I know I'm very provoking sometimes. I always was."

"It was my fault," he replied. "I was jealous of Jack. It was silly of me, I might have known the uselessness of it," and there was a shadow of regret in his voice.

"Yes, it is quite useless," she answered, and proceeded to go on with her work.

He winced a little, but was determined not to give way again.

"Would you care to come to the Imperial Institute and hear the band?" he asked; "it's well worth it."

"I don't care about it, but I will go if you want me to," she answered.

"I don't want you to go just to please me; but I think you would enjoy it. The people are an interesting sight in themselves. I don't care to go alone," he added, after a slight pause.

For answer she rose quietly and put aside her work. "I will be ready in ten minutes," she said, and left the room.

But it did not turn out a success after all, and they sat and listened to the band and watched the people, for the most part in silence.

After an hour, a pallid whiteness on Madge's face and a certain strained look in her eyes attracted his notice, and he asked her kindly if she wasn't feeling well.

"Yes, I am quite well," she answered hurriedly, and looked away from him.

"Have you had enough? Shall we go home?" and his voice sounded very gentle.

"I don't mind, just as you like!"

She shivered a little, so he got up, saying: "Yes, we may as well. I can see you are cold," and he folded her cloak closer round her. He thought he saw a suspicious gleam of moisture in her eyes, but she persistently looked away from him, so he could not be sure. He said nothing, however, but drew her arm through his and led her from the crowd.

"Is anything the matter?" he asked as they walked slowly homewards; "you don't look well and you are so quiet. You were not hurt at what I said to-night, were you?"

"No, I am all right, it is your imagination," and her voice sounded harder than she meant it, by reason of the effort it cost her to steady it.

"Then we must have sat too long and taken a cold. Didn't you like the band? I always think it's such a pretty sight when the gardens are lighted up, don't you?"

"I don't care for those sorts of sights."

"Why not? What don't you like about it? Something is bothering you; what is it?"

She caught her breath, then answered in a low quick voice of stifled feeling, seeming to let herself go—

"It mocks me so! you don't know! you can't think! I don't see the people or the lights or anything as you do. I see my three graves, with the everlasting hills round them, and the trees moaning over them. I don't want to be thoughtless and gay like that butterfly throng, I want my lost ones, or, at least, to know that I shall see them again. When I hear the laughing and chattering all round it rings horribly in my ears. I think how empty and vain it all is and how, sooner or later, everyone there will lie under the cold ground with the wind moaning around them. I think how many of those smiling faces hide aching hearts and blighted lives, and how hopelessly we all seem to be the sport of circumstances. They think of it too, they must, if they have ever stood by an open grave that held someone precious. But they blind themselves and forget for a little while; I can't! They only ask 'where?' and 'when?' occasionally, but I am always asking it. I try not to care, but it's no use; I can do nothing but grope helplessly in the dark and find no light."

Her voice broke and she leaned heavily upon him, bending her head that he might not see the visible emotion in her face.

He drew her closer to him and said in a husky voice, "You look at things in such a strange light, Madge dear. I wish you could be more simple and less morbid. Other people can trust that it's all right, why can't you?"

"Because I can't!" she exclaimed, half-passionately, "I don't think it is all right; I think it's all wrong. Don't you see how, all the time, the wicked people triumph and the innocent suffer?"