

if she wanted forgiveness, for her self-will and disobedience."

There was a long silence.

"Well," said Bertha at last, "Rosamund is the only one who has come back to the old nest after all. Hazel's gone right away from me—I know that well enough, in spite of all her loving letters—and won't ever come back. Little Francie took her own way and followed a will-o'-the-wisp that she thought was the Star in the East, and I tell you, Sybil, that before she'd been in that place six months she was just as remote and far away from us as though she'd been in another world. Why, her very language wasn't ours any longer—her whole scale of values had shifted. . . . Someone who saw her once after she had entered told me it was like talking to someone with a thick wall of impenetrable glass all round. You could see her—but you could never get near . . . never be in touch again. . . ."

"You are nearer now, perhaps," softly said Lady Argent.

"Who knows? But the child that's come back to me is Rosamund. And I shan't fail her, Sybil."

"No, Bertie," said Lady Argent lovingly. "You would never fail her."

"Never," repeated Bertha with curiously intense conviction. "You see, apart from everything else, she's the one of the three that has sought me when other things failed her. It's an appeal that one doesn't forget. I have to *give*, you know, Sybil. I'm made that way—and Rosamund has every claim on me."

There was silence again, and Bertha only broke it to take her departure with a brisk matter-of-factness that seemed to draw a swift curtain across some intimate threshold to a sanctuary where even her own footsteps seldom penetrated.

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