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It would have been easier for Wilmot Allen if he could have come into Barbara's life for the first time. She was too used to him to appreciate such of his qualities as were fine and noble at their true value. And contrarily it was the same familiarity which limned his faults so clearly and perhaps exaggerated them. She often thought that if she could see him for the first time she would fall head over ears in love with him, and be married to him out of hand. Was it not better therefore, since the man's character had its disillusionments, that their life-long friendship precluded the idea of marrying in haste and repenting at leisure? "It's almost," she said to herself, "as if I had married him long ago and found out that I had made a mistake."

But she hated to hurt him in any way. And it caused her a genuine sorrow sometimes to say no to him. He had proposed to her many times a year for many, many years, and always with a passion and sincerity that made it appear as if he was proposing for the first time in his life. Twice, the strength and devotion of his physical presence had seemed to remove every doubt of him from her mind, and she had said that she would marry him, and had been ecstatically happy while he kissed her and held her in his arms. And each time better knowledge of