

Everything seemed somehow changed. It was as if someone had suddenly shouldered her responsibilities, and she would never have to think again for herself. Her lips, her eyes, her hair, were kissed in turn. She was being crushed; yet she was conscious only of a feeling of complete content.

Suddenly the realisation of what was happening dawned upon her, and she strove to free herself. With all her force she pushed Bowen from her. He released her. She stood back looking at him with crimson cheeks and unseeing eyes. She was conscious that something unusual was happening to her, something in which she appeared to have no voice. Perhaps it was all a dream. She swayed a little. The same sensation she had fought back at the telephone was overcoming her. Was she going to faint? It would be ridiculous to faint in Bowen's rooms. . . . did people faint? Was it really, as Aunt Adelaide had told her, because the heart missed a beat? One beat——

She felt Bowen's arm round her, she seemed to sway towards a chair. Was the chair really moving away from her? Then the mist seemed to clear. Someone was kneeling beside her.

Bowen gazed at her anxiously. Her face was now colourless, and her eyes closed wearily. She sighed as a tired child sighs before falling asleep.

"Patricia! what is the matter?" cried Bowen in alarm. "You haven't fainted, have you?"

She was conscious of the absurdity of the question. She opened her eyes with a curious fluttering move-