

"Yes. A trifle steep, isn't it? And, for a man in his position, a wife's a rather important item."

"Something more than an amiable housekeeper—is that your meaning?" Miss O'Neill rounded on him, a flash of temper in her eyes. "I thought better of *you*, Mr. Lenox. But you're all alike in the grain. A man in Sir Mark's position must have a beautiful figure-head for his dinner-table: a graceful, accommodating doll, that he can hang with jewels and silks and satins. But my Bel's no doll-woman, for all her soft manners and sweet temper. No doubt he flatters himself that, in a fortnight, he's read her from cover to cover: and he'll be telling her, sure as fate, that he's the one man on earth to make her happy, and think he's paying her the compliment of her life into the bargain!"

Good-natured Maurice began to feel that Forsyth had been a trifle inconsiderate, saddling him with a virago whom he was quite at a loss how to appease.

"Well—compliment or no, she's free to refuse him," he remarked soothingly; "and after all, it's the natural thing."

Miss O'Neill pounced on the words almost before they were out. "*Of course* it's the natural thing for a man like Sir Mark—spoilt by his mother, one can see with half an eye—to snatch at a beautiful woman. And where does a girl's freedom come in when a man dazzles her brain with extravagant lover's talk? Besides—he's rich. She's poor. It almost amounts to bribery. I hate the whole thing. I came away for her sake, to give her a chance of knowing him better, just in case—— But if it's true, what you say, I shall go straight down again——"

She sprang up from her rock and faced about; but Lenox, smilingly determined, stood astride across the narrow path.

"Excuse me, Miss O'Neill, not if I can prevent it," he said. "Forsyth's going to have his chance fair