

she may have fooled me? Accepted all my worldly goods under a pretence of caring——?"

"No: not pretence," she interrupted, with a flash of impatience. "How *can* I make myself clear to you if you won't let me finish a sentence? I mean that your sudden infatuation—I can call it nothing else—might very well turn any girl's head and tempt her to imagine herself in love with you when she is really in love with the whole thing; flattered—
attracted——"

"Mother, be quiet! I *will* not hear you." There was pain as well as anger in the cry. "You don't understand her. You won't try to understand her. You're simply jealous—prejudiced. And I was counting on you—oh, confound it all——"

He swung round on his heel and strode away from her that she might not see how deeply he was wounded by the failure of one who had never failed him yet.

And she, feeling suddenly exhausted, sank down on the sofa near which she had been standing; her lips compressed; her face strained and hard.

The silence lasted little more than a minute; but to both it seemed interminable. Their deep and real devotion had never been less apparent than now: yet, even in that antagonistic pause each knew it unshaken, unshakable, by anything that either might say or do. Hence its infinite capacity for inflicting pain.

Mark remained standing by the window; and Lady Forsyth's answer, when it came, was addressed to the unpromising outline of his back and shoulders.

"If you won't hear me, Mark, there is no more to be said. It has been difficult enough to speak at all at such a moment——"

"Then I wish to God you'd held your tongue," he flashed round upon her. "You haven't succeeded in shaking my faith—in her. You've only taken the shine out of the happiest day of my life—if that's any consolation to you!"