

that sounded far too like a travesty of his own chosen love-song.

“ ‘I kissed her-r twice and I asked her-r once if she wad be my br-ride,’ ” sang Maurice with insolent gusto, burring his r’s like a policeman’s rattle; and Mark simply wanted to kick him into the loch.

Lady Forsyth, on the other hand, was privately blessing the boy’s foolery, that seemed to clear the air and sent the boats skimming homeward to the swing of chorus on chorus; only her son’s voice being conspicuous by its absence. Keith’s boat was leading now; and without turning round deliberately she could see nothing of the two who haunted her mind.

This was perhaps fortunate; for Mark’s arm lay along the back of the seat, his shoulder was within three inches of Bel’s; and under cover of the music they had picked up the dropped thread of their talk in lowered tones that imparted a tender significance to the simplest remark.

“I don’t call your singing a half-fledged talent,” he said with a faint stress on the pronoun. “You’ve the gift, anyway. Why not make more of it—study, practise?”

She smiled and lifted her shoulders. “I’ve tried, but I couldn’t keep it up. Laziness, perhaps; I don’t know. Vanity, perhaps, a little. I either want to do things splendidly or else—I can’t be bothered. I need some one to spur me, to encourage me.”

“Well, I should have thought Miss O’Neill——”

“Harry? Oh yes, she’d lie down and let me walk over her if I wanted to. But she’s swamped in ‘the Cause’ and philanthropic work. As for my talents, when I wanted the helping hand it wasn’t there; and now—it’s too late. I’ve dabbled first in one thing and then in another, and frittered away what little ambition I ever had.”