

broke in suddenly and a little angrily, and he pushed his way through the crowd, Eve clinging to his arm. Neither of them spoke until they had got some distance away; then, after a hurried glance behind him to be sure that David was not following, he said quietly: "Would you mind walking home?"

"Not in the least. I should enjoy it."

"I'm afraid we should have a difficulty in getting a cab now. There's such a crowd waiting."

"Perhaps we ought to have left earlier. I hope you don't mind?"

"Mind? I shall be glad of the walk and a little fresh air."

She came closer to him the nearer they got to Rose Villa and leaned more heavily on his arm. She was getting tired. Her cheek sometimes touched his shoulder. He could feel her breath when she raised her face to reply to some remark of his; her eyes shone in the lamp-light. Once or twice he fancied that her hand trembled.

He held himself in check with resolute will. He might not be able to help loving Eve, but he could help making any sign of it. He owed that to himself, to Eve, and to his friend Geoff Lincoln.

So they talked spasmodically about commonplace things till they reached Rose Villa. He held her hand for the briefest moment as they said good night. He had not the courage to look into her face. He would have given the world to have taken her in his arms and kissed her.

"You will come again soon?" she called from within the doorway.

"Yes, soon," and he strode away into the darkness.

Three days later he redeemed his promise and dropped in at Rose Villa a little after tea-time; he told himself that he hadn't the cheek to go to tea again so soon.

He had felt more or less depressed all the day. A vague sense of impending trouble haunted him. He wanted cheering up. Autumn was always a depressing time; the falling leavess addened him. Naturally his thoughts turned to Eve Marsden's cosy drawing-room and to Eve herself. She was nearly always cheerful, whoever might be depressed, and what was more, she always gave him a warm welcome whenever he called.

His heart was beating uncomfortably fast when he came in sight of Rose Villa. The light was full on in the drawing-room, the professor's study above was in darkness. He paused for a moment with his hand on the garden gate. He thought again of the moth and the candle. It was foolish of him, no doubt, to see so much of Eve. He was deliberately scorching his heart, adding to his burden with each successive visit.

The door was opened directly in response to his ring, and the professor stood before him.

"Oh, I thought it was Eve," he said in a tone of disappointment. "She ought to have been at home nearly two hours ago. They went out for a motor ride, fully intending to be back to tea."

"They?"

"She and David Wiggs. She did not want to go particularly, but I persuaded her. I thought a spin in the fresh air would do her good. I hope they have not met with an accident; but I am bound to admit I am getting alarmed, and the night is so frightfully dark."

"Which way did they go?"

"They turned in the direction of the Woodstock Road. 'Just an hour's run,' David said, 'or an hour and a half at the outside.'"

Bart stood still in the doorway with a troubled look in his eyes. A dozen vague fears haunted him—Had she gone out with anyone else he would have been less concerned. But David Wiggs—

He tried to put his fears aside. There had been a breakdown, perhaps. Such things were not uncommon, and a breakdown in the country would mean very considerable delay.

"He has a good chauffeur, I presume, who understands the machine?" Bart questioned after a pause.

"Oh, no, he drives himself. He says he has become quite an expert driver."

"But do you mean to say—?" he began, then stopped abruptly. It was not his place to criticize. "I hope there has been nothing worse than a breakdown," he ended, after a pause.

"But think what that might mean!" the old man interrupted excitedly. "Suppose that should happen in some lonely country lane, miles away from any house—"

"Mr. Wiggs would keep to the high roads, surely?" Bart answered with a curious tightening of the muscles round his lips.

"He may have taken some cut across country. I'm afraid he's a little fond of showing off his skill as a driver."

Bart glanced up at the clock and was silent. He was too troubled himself to be of much comfort to anyone else. Besides, he could not resist the conviction that Wiggs had deliberately led Eve into a trap. That he loved Eve in his own coarse, violent way, there could be no doubt. That he had not given up hopes of winning her was evident from his effusive manner on the night of the concert. That he would not stick at niceties to secure his own ends was known to nearly everyone who knew him at all.

Bart got up after awhile and began to pace up and down the room. He had scarcely courage to follow his own argument to its conclusion. He felt almost sick with fear and misgiving.

The professor was the first to break the silence. It was evident that similar, if not the very same thoughts had been working in his brain.

"I—I fear I made a mistake," he faltered after a long pause. "I ought not to have persuaded Eve to go."

"It was no doubt a mistake," Bart answered doggedly, and he glanced again at the clock. For awhile he stood as if deep in thought.

"Look here," he said at length, "I cannot possibly stay here doing nothing."

"But what can you do?" the old man questioned.

"I don't know. But I shall suffocate if I stay here. I must get out into the night and into the wind. I must listen, call, search. There has been no accident, or you would have heard ere this. The thing to be apprehended is something very different. Good-bye for the present," and he hurried out of the room and out of the house.

CHAPTER IX

THE WRONG TURN

THE professor did not overstate the truth when he told Bart that he had persuaded Eve to go for a ride with David Wiggs. If he had stated that he had commanded her, he would not have been very wide of the mark. Eve certainly would not have gone if she had merely consulted her own wishes. Her sense of the fitness of things protested against it.

The old man, however, took quite an opposite view, he insisted that Eve should go. "I can't possibly go myself," he said. "I wish I could, but there is no reason in the world why you should not go."

"But really, father," she protested, "I don't think it is quite the thing."

At which he lost his temper and sneered at the silliness of women and the stupidity of convention, and intimidated broadly that while she lived at home



"The next instant his heart gave a great bound. 'Miss Marsden—Eve!' he cried."

with him he expected to have his wishes carried out.

So Eve yielded in the end, as she was in the habit of yielding; but in a very rebellious frame of mind.

Until they got outside the town, David did not attempt to speak to her. He gave all his attention to steering the machine; but when they got beyond the last house, and there was a straight road in front of them, he turned his head suddenly and looked at her.

"Doesn't she run sweet?"

"I suppose so. I've had very little experience of motor-cars."

He sounded his horn in passing the end of a road, then turned his head again.

"We are going twenty-five miles an hour. You'd hardly think it, would you?"

"No; I shouldn't have thought we were traveling so fast."

"I could run her up to fifty easily, but you never know exactly where the police-traps are. Beastly nuisance all these rules and regulations; don't you think so?"

"I don't think I want to travel any faster," she replied.

"And are you enjoying it?"

"Yes—on the whole—"

"I knew you would when you got going," he said, his freckled face lighting up with pleasure.

"And isn't the scenery scrummy hereabouts?"

"Yes, it's very beautiful."

"And yet, do you know, I'd rather look at you than at the most beautiful scenery in the world."

"Did you bring me out here to say this to me?" she questioned angrily.

"Oh, no. Only you drive me into saying things."

You are so pretty, and I do love you so much; I do, indeed, and it's awfully hard to keep one's mouth shut. And while there's life there's hope, you know. You are not married to Geoff Lincoln yet. Isn't there still a chance for me?"

"How dare you ask such a question?" she asked, half raising from her seat. "I must request you to turn the car and go back home again."

"As you will," he answered sullenly. "But I don't think you ought to be angry with a man because he loves you. He pays you the highest compliment he is able to pay."

"You have no right to pay me 'the compliment' as you call it, under the circumstances. If you did not know, it would have been different."

"But people often break their engagement. They find out their mistake, get tired of waiting, and all that. You may have to wait and wait until you are quite old—"

"Will you stop the car, please, and turn back?" she requested, with flaming cheeks.

"Of course I will. It is quite time we retraced our steps if we are to reach Oxford before dark."

In a few minutes the machinery was humming again and they were spinning along the way they had come. Eve leaned back into the corner, and shut her eyes. She was impatient to get home again.

It grew dark rapidly, and David got out at length and lighted the lamps.

Then he started the engine again, and set off once more at a great pace.

Eve became conscious after awhile that the road was less even than it had been. She looked out of the window, but she could see nothing. The hedge could scarcely be distinguished from the road, and the fields beyond were quite invisible.

Her companion, however, did not appear to be worried. He knew the way, and she quite expected that in a little while now the lights of Oxford would come into sight. David had not spoken for a considerable time. He sat back in his seat, a rather tense figure, but apparently quite alert.

The car had slackened its pace considerably since they turned their faces toward Oxford, but the jolting grew more and more pronounced. Eve could not understand it. She remembered no jolting on the way out. On the contrary, the run had been remarkable for its smoothness.

She looked again through the window, but she could see nothing. Almost unconsciously she became a little nervous. It was not altogether pleasant to be shut up in a car alone with David Wiggs, especially on such a dark night and so far away from home.

Suddenly the brakes seemed to be jammed down, and the car came to a full stop. David jumped up at once, and a moment or two later was looking at the engine by the light of one of the lamps; then he came back to his seat, and examined the petrol gauge, giving a low whistle as he did so. Eve leaned forward with a white, scared face.

"Is anything the matter?" she asked, doing her best, though not very successfully, to keep her voice steady.

"I'm awfully sorry," he answered, holding up the lamp, and looking at her, "but we have run out of petrol."

"But what are we to do?" she questioned anxiously.

"Haven't the remotest idea. As a matter of fact, I don't know where we are. We seem to have got off the track somehow."

"Off the track?" and there was fear in every word and tone.

"I'm afraid so. Must have taken a wrong turn somewhere. I've been looking for familiar land marks this last half-hour. At present we seem to be in the heart of a wood, miles away from everywhere."

"But what are we to do?"

"Stay where we are. There is nothing else for it. It's awkward, I admit; but what can't be cured must be endured. When daylight comes we shall be able to discover where we are."

"Do you mean that we shall have to stay here all night?"

For a moment he did not reply. It was exactly what he did mean, but he was afraid to alarm her too much.

"Of course, somebody may come by and help us out of our difficulty. We must hope for the best."

For awhile she was silent; but her brain was working rapidly. She felt as certain as she did of her own existence that David had set a trap for her, and her father had compelled her to walk into it. What he hoped to accomplish she could not quite understand, but that seemed to reveal itself a few minutes later.

"I feel awfully cut up about it," he said, bending over the back of the seat in her direction. "People are always so ready to talk. Had we been engaged, it wouldn't, of course, have mattered—"

"I hope you won't think I brought you here on purpose," he went on, in tones that were meant to be soothing. "I can assure you I am as distressed about the matter as you can be."

She wanted to fling the lie back into his teeth, but was afraid to anger him. "It is very unfortunate," she whispered, after a long pause; and her voice shook in spite of every effort to keep it still.

"You are cold," he said. "Why, your teeth are chattering! I will come and sit close to you, and help to keep you warm," and he began to clamber in her direction.

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