

"You picked me up. Do you remember?"

"So I did; so I did."

She looked aside, blushing.

"I wonder whether you could do it again—now," she whispered.

For answer he seized her, and lifted her easily from the ground, looking up into her face, while she looked down upon his, half frightened, half delighted at the strength she had provoked. She half closed her eyes as he drew her downwards, wondering if he could hear the throbbing of her heart; and then—conscious, possibly, of an arrested movement—she opened her eyes wide, meeting his eyes with a glance of mingled surprise and interrogation. Now, the moon played no Protean tricks. The Michael intently regarding her was the man of thirty-five, scarred by suffering; and she knew that to him, also, she was no longer the nymph, but the woman who had put away long ago childish things, although not all of them. Only for a moment did he hold her poised, as it were, between the past and the future. Then he put her down gently.

"I am stronger than I used to be," he said.

"I am strong, too," Téphany replied, with a certain defiance, knowing that he distrusted not his, but her weakness. Michael smiled as he turned from her.

"Michael!—"

"Well?"

"When you come to-morrow, bring the mask with you."

"The mask?"

"That we may destroy it—together, before we begin the new life."

He did not answer without a brief delay. When his eyes sought hers, he knew that she would not fail him—that the night would but strengthen her determination to begin the new life without looking back upon the old.

"You are right," he replied. "I will bring the mask with me, and you shall destroy it."