

feeling he will—*she's* not likely to refuse him. And that's all he cares about at the moment. I'm not being unjust to him, dear. I'm facing the truth; which is sometimes quite as difficult as facing cannon. But—well, I can't talk about it. You talk, instead. You haven't told me half enough yet about India. I've an idea—something happened out there. Am I right?"

The girl nodded, looking seaward. "I've been wanting to tell you and yet rather shirking it. This one—hurt me a good deal."

"Another 'poor thing'?"

"Yes. What Mark would call a worm. The third in two and a half years! I begin to be ashamed of myself. And—a little afraid too." She paused. "Mums, because I'm not a wobbler myself, will it always be the wobbling men who insist on clinging to me? Shall I perhaps be driven by this troublesome law of opposites to choose between marrying some pitifully lovable 'poor thing' or—never marrying at all? Not lively alternatives—are they?"

Lady Forsyth's hand slipped from the girl's shoulder to her waist. "Darling, I hope it won't come to that."

"So do I. Naturally I'd . . . prefer to marry. I—" she hesitated and coloured a little, "I would feel desolate . . . without children. Am I very . . . premature?"

Lady Forsyth drew her close and kissed her warm cheek.

"You're very woman," she said. "And Fate may have better things in store for you than the most importunate wobbler of them all. I hope you discouraged this last one more decisively than his predecessor."

Sheila shook her head. "I simply couldn't. They do tug badly at my heart-strings. No denying it."

"I suppose that means he's still hanging on?"