

"Because I've no gift of creation. But I love the drama, and the enticement of the theatre is strong upon me."

"That's why I've come to you to-day. I'm in a quandary. I've had an awful time this afternoon at the theatre. I've lost my temper. I've been rude without intending to be. I've—I've perspired with fury."

"I believe I'm rude too, sometimes."

"But surely not by accident? You're not so weak as all that."

"But to be rude with intention is morally more blameworthy than——"

"I know, I know. But the unforgivable sin is weakness."

"What's happened?"

"I'll tell you briefly."

He told her. She listened, keeping her blue eyes steady. A faint look of disgust came on her face as he talked, eagerly, evidently seeking sympathy with an energy almost greedy.

"And so now I've got to find an actress who'll do, who'll more than do if possible, and I must find her at once. If only they'd take Miss Mulholland! I happen to know she's free."

Mrs. Sartoris laid a hand that felt strong and steady on his arm.

"Don't bite me! But I agree with them about Averil Mulholland."

Dale looked astonished.

"You—agree?"

"Yes. Averil's a dear friend of mine. She's a splendid woman, and she's a very fine actress. But she does lack something, and it's something that I think every really great actress must have. Sarah had it. Duse had it. Bartet had it. Ada Rehan had it. And no doubt in former times Rachel and all the great ones. There is something sexless about Averil. She's too austere. Brain preponderates too much in her. She may convince a man, but she doesn't entice him. And I've noticed that the women who rave about her are the intellectual women, not those who are run after by men. I quite understand what you feel about the managers, but probably they have some understanding of their job."

"You make me feel very young and absurd!"

"Not absurd! You are young."

"I'm thirty."