

The pause that follows is more significant than any words. Camilla's low laugh comes through it softly.

'An excellent idea, Vane. I did not give you credit for so much strategy. Of course Dorothy is to be kept in the dark?'

'Of course. She has a sort of liking for my wife, and might blurt out something. She will like to see the old place again, she spent her youth there, you know.'

'How long are we to remain, she and I, I mean?'

'A week or two, as you like. Of course I would be very glad to keep you there, Camilla, but you would not like it. It is dead-ly dull; the nearest hamlet is five miles off; nothing but moors behind, stretching up to the sky, and the sea in front melting into the horizon. A week I dare say will be as much of it as you will be able to exist through. No one will wonder at Lady Valentine's remaining—it is surely the most natural thing in the world that she should remain with her husband under the circumstances. Now perhaps we had better go in. I have not dined. After dinner I shall speak to Dolores, and—the rest will be easy.'

They pass out of sight and hearing—this time there is no return. The nightingale on the thorn-bush near has the night to itself and its sweet love-song.

Dolores lies where she has sunk, her face hidden in her hands, the chill, fresh-scented grass, cool and grateful to her heated head. She is numb and aching, full of a cold, deathly torpor—'past hope, past care, past help.' Life has come to an end—just that. 'And now I live, and now my life is done'—done—done for ever and forever!

After a time—not long—though it seems long to her, a physical strength of discomfort and cold makes her get up. Once on her feet she stands for a moment dizzily—then turns mechanically and walks back to the house. It is late, and she will be missed; she does not want to be missed, she is hardly conscious of more than that. If she suffers she hardly realizes it—in soul and body she is benumbed. Much pain, many blows, have dulled for the time all sense of agony.

They are all three in the drawing-room when she enters, Miss Valentine bending over her never-ending account-books. Miss Routh at the piano. Her fingers are flying over the keys in a brilliant gallop, she laughs up in Sir Vane's face, and chatters gayly as she plays. She looks over her shoulder keenly at the new comer, her mocking smile at its most derisive.

'How pale you are, Lady Valentine,' she says; 'whither have you been wandering

until this unearthly hour? See! our truant has returned in your absence. She has pined herself to a shadow, as you may see for yourself, in your absence, Vane. You must take her with you to Cornwall, I think!'

Sir Vane rises and comes forward, quite like the old Sir Vane of Italian days, courteous if cold, and takes her hand.

'You do look pale, Dolores. You should not stay about in the night air. And see—your dress is quite wet with dew. I have returned to answer your letter in person. Naturally it annoyed me. How can you credit such a cock-and-bull story? Come here and sit down, and let us talk the thing over.'

He leads her to a chair—wonderful cordiality, this! and takes another near her. It is quite a lover-like tableau—Miss Routh's gray-green eyes gleam derisively as she glances. Dolores takes up a screen and holds it before her face.

'The light dazzles my eyes,' she says, without meeting his glance.

He looks at her suspiciously. She is singularly, startlingly pale; her eyes look wild, and dark, and dazed—what is the matter with her? Has this story and Macdonald's coming turned her brain? But his voice is smooth, conspicuously smooth and gentle when he speaks. She sits, the screen held well before her face, her eyes fixed upon its frisky Japanese figures, but seeing none of them. His voice is in her ear, as he talks steadily on and on—she hears its tone, but is scarcely conscious of his words. Miss Routh's gay playing fills the room; she plays the 'Beautiful Blue Danube'—his monotonous words set themselves to the gay, bright music, and blend and lose themselves in the melody—all mingle themselves together in her mind; nothing seems clear or distinct.

Is she assenting or answering at all to what he says? Afterward she does not know. He seems to be satisfied, at least, when he rises at last, and leaves her, crossing over to Camilla Routh.

'Well?' she asks.

'It is well. I knew it would be. She says yes to everything. She will go.'

'I don't believe she knows what she is saying,' thinks Miss Routh, glancing across at her. 'She sits there with the fixed, vacant look of a sleep-walker. She had it when she came in. What if she heard us talking out there. It is very possible. Suppose she has—what then?'

She looks once more more, trying to read her answer in that pale, rigid face. As she looks Dolores rises, and without glancing at any one, or speaking, quits the room.

'H'm!' muses Miss Routh, thoughtfully,