

clear carmine, beautiful to see. "Oh, Mark! Give me a few minutes to realise it all. You're so impatient. Such a boy. You make me feel . . . ages old——"

"Look here, I can't have you talking that sort of rot," he protested; incorrigibly blunt, even in love. "It's morbid sentimentalism. You see, I'm the son of a mother who doesn't know how to feel old at fifty. 'Boy,' indeed! You're a mere child yourself—the dearest in creation."

"No—no. I'm *not* a child." Her emphatic protest rang true. "Perhaps your mother has kept the bloom on life. Mine has never had any bloom on it, worth mentioning. I was reared in a groove; a very virtuous groove; and . . . I didn't fit. I wanted to feel and know and live; to be something more than a vegetable in a Wiltshire village. I knew I had talents of sorts; and I felt, if I could only get away and have a fair chance, I might achieve something worth doing, or, at least . . . meet a man worth marrying." She spoke looking away from him across the sun-splashed water. "The only brother I cared about went off to the ends of the earth before he was twenty. If I'd been old enough to go with him, I wouldn't be here now!"

"Poor darling!" He tightened his hold of her. "Dreadful calamity— isn't it—to be here now? But didn't your mother understand you—help you?"

"Poor little mother. She did her best. My unconventional streak comes from her side. But she's a very tame edition; watered down by an early marriage with father, who's as conventional as a high road, but unfortunately not as broad! Privately, I think she was half proud of me and half terrified of what I might do next, like the hen in Hans Andersen. It was father's pharisaical attitude towards my mild vagaries that made me worse, till at last I kicked