

"You have seen him perhaps?"

"Yes, I have just parted from him."

"And where now?"

"I am walking back to the Coburg."

"May I walk with you?"

Estelle hesitated a moment.

"I think not, if you don't mind, Lord Allingham."

Then, moved by some odd impulse, she looked up into his kind face and smiled unreservedly.

"I suppose you guess, but I think I will tell you. I am going to marry Mr. Bygrave."

"I congratulate him and you—but more especially him," and he bared his head a moment in token of his deep respect. "You have not chosen an easy post in undertaking to keep that firebrand in order."

"Oh, but he is not a firebrand any longer," said Estelle with her sweet smile. "I don't know what tempted me to tell you. Need I ask you not to speak of it? My—my people know nothing yet, and it may be something of a trial to them."

Allingham nodded in full understanding. But, though he left her with a smile, his face quickly aged and saddened, for he was a man who had been fitted by nature for the best gifts, and who yet, in some strange and bitter way, had been cheated of them all.

Quite late that night in their hotel bedroom Cyrus Rodney and his wife discussed their family affairs.

Estelle had told them of her engagement just before she retired, and the news had naturally upset them a good deal.

"It's no use pretending to be pleased, Cyrus," said Mrs. Rodney, "for it would not be in human nature to rejoice over a thing like that when one thinks that Estelle might have been Lady Allingham. If he did not propose, at least it was Estelle who prevented him."