

voice lowered a little, grew more slow; "if this had come to me then, I might not have been so happy. Then I was full of — other dreams. Now, Bernon, it is all different. I thought I loved you then. I know I love you now. The old love, though, was half made up of plans about myself. The new one grew up out of it, when I came back here to find you looking ill and worried, when I came back to face the dread that, sooner or later, you were bound to go away entirely out of my life. And then —"

"And then, Hilda?" Tremaine urged her, after a little pause.

The answer came slowly, and so low that Don could but just overhear it.

"Then," and the words held a shudder; "then I was so wretched, Bernon, that I did not care very much what did happen. Something had come to change you, something I could not understand, something that made me love you more than ever, only in a different way, more unselfishly, perhaps, and very hopelessly. It was as if we both were fighting something invisible, fighting it and struggling to join hands across the darkness. And then, last night, I understood it all, everything!" Her voice throbbed, grew eager, happy. "And then I knew that you were mine, my brother, the brother I have always wished for, and that nothing could ever separate us any more."

A long pause followed. Hilda broke it.

"Bernon," she said slowly; "even now I can't believe that you are really my own, really my big brother. I have wanted a big brother, all my life. It's been a lonely life, too, Bernon, with all its froth and fun. Again and again, if it had n't been for dear old Don, I think I