

'I am going back to-morrow. I wanted to see you to-night, Denis, before your mother and sister come down.'

'Yes,' said Denis, rather absently. He had caught sight of a shadow on the blind at one of the Rectory windows, and for a moment his thoughts wandered to Winifred.

'Can you guess why?'

'No; what is it? Anything particular?'

'Yes. Will you give your sister to me, Denis?'

'Rhoda?' A smile dawned on the surgeon's face. 'I have no control over her. It would be rather late in the day for me to seek to rule her actions, wouldn't it?'

The curate smiled too; but in a moment Holgate became serious and earnest, and, turning to his friend, grasped his hand.

'We have been brothers so long, Gilbert, that it seems as if nothing could bring us any nearer to each other,' he said. 'But there is nothing in the world would give me greater joy than to see Rhoda your wife.'

'I thought so, but I wanted to hear it from your lips,' said the curate. 'I feel at times that I have asked a great deal from her. She is so young and beautiful. Life is all before her. And I am growing old, Denis, and these motherless boys are no light charge.'

'Old! You will never be old. And if Rhoda chooses to take the boys, Gilbert, she will not consider them a burden. It will be the very life for her. She *has* promised, I hope?'