

me! Darling, I love you. Be my wife and let me shield you always."

Her head had sunk upon his shoulder.

"Can you love me a little," he went on with quick passionate utterance. "Oh, Mary, don't say that I'm too old, that you can't—"

Two slim arms slid up, and met round his neck. He bent his head, and his lips touched hers.

Distant, but drawing nearer, came the pleasant sound of harmonious voices:

"Oh come, all ye faithful,
Joyful and triumphant!"

"And what about the other?" Barlas said some twenty minutes later, when the waits had come and departed royally fed. He was kneeling by the side of her chair and holding her hands. "Darling, did you care for him very much?"

The girl's face flushed and then grew deadly pale. She burst into a torrent of tears. "Oh," she cried, "I'm a wicked girl, I'm a wicked girl."

"For God's sake, what do you mean?"

"There never was any other man! John, I made it all up! No one ever came courting me like they did other girls, so I pretended that I had a lover. I used to think about it such a

lot I almost got to believe it was true!"

"You little dear, you foolish little dear!"

"I could not help it, life was so dull. And when you asked me, I didn't know you then like I do now—it all came out naturally. But I didn't mean to deceive you, I really didn't."

He laughed aloud, a strong male laugh of triumph.

"And the photograph," he almost shouted, "what about his photograph?"

"It's here," she whispered, pulling at a thin chain round her neck and drawing out a small photograph in a circular frame of metal.

"I found it among mother's things when she died, so I wore it and then I began to imagine and make up—Oh, John, what a little fool I was!"

"No, dear, you weren't a fool in the least," he answered as he took the photograph in his hand and looked at it curiously.

It was a photograph of himself at the age of nineteen!

He recognized it instantly, and remembered the occasion on which it had been taken—to whom he had given it.

"What was your mother's name before she was married, Mary?" he whispered hoarsely.

"Jenny Pennistone."

