

Marbridge nodded at her with a curling lip: "You can get out!"

She turned sharply and left the room, banging the door.

"That's the kind *she* is," Marbridge commented. "You were lucky to get rid of her as easy as you did. . . . Give me more brandy, will you, like a good fellow — and be stingy with the water. I've got to . . . hold out a couple of hours more."

Matthias served him.

"I presume Venetia knows nothing about this, yet?"

Having drunk, Marbridge shook his head. "Not yet. Now, listen . . . You guessed it: I want you to help hush this up, for Venetia's sake. . . . Rotten mess — do no good if it gets in the papers — only humiliation for her. Will you — ?"

"What is it you want me to do?"

"Help me home and keep your mouth shut. . . . You see, this is my place; I've had it years; very handy — private entrance — all that. . . . Nella used to meet me here. That's how she came to have a key. I'd forgotten. . . . Well, I got tired of her, and she could n't act, and Arlington was sore about that. So we planned to get rid of her. I guess you must've heard. It was a dirty business, all round. . . . And tonight, when her play went to pieces, just as we'd planned it should, she saw how she'd been bilked and lost her head. . . . Came here, let herself in quietly, without the maid's hearing her, and shot me when I came in with Joan. I managed to get the gun away before she could turn it on herself, and locked her up. Then — hysterics. . . . Well, I'm finished. I asked for it, and got it. . . . No: no remorse bunk, no deathbed repentance, nothing like that! But I realize I've been a pretty rotten proposition, last and last. Never mind. . . . What I'm getting at's this: nobody need suffer but me. That's where *you* come in. For Venetia's sake. You and Arlington and the doctor can