

words—"you can't—you can't have quite decided upon what the answer will be!"

Lady Brian sighed again. "Oh, do let us have a little common sense!" she said, with just a touch of irritation. "Of course I have decided. The decision has been simply thrust upon me. I had no choice."

"Then you mean to say Yes?" Maud's voice fell suddenly flat. She turned her face again to the open sea, a glint of desperation in her eyes.

"Yes," said Lady Brian very definitely. "I mean to say Yes."

"Then Heaven help us!" said Maud, under her breath.

"My dear, don't be profane!" said Lady Brian.

CHAPTER II

THE IDOL

"I SAY, Maud, what a dratted long time you've been! What on earth have you and the mother been doing?" Young Bernard Brian turned his head towards his sister with the chafing, impatient movement of one bitterly at variance with life. "You swore you wouldn't be long," he said.

"I know. I'm sorry." Maud came to his side and stooped over him. "I couldn't help it, Punny," she said. "I haven't been enjoying myself."

He looked up at her suspiciously. "Oh, it's never your fault," he said, with dreary sarcasm.

Maud said nothing. She only laid a smoothing hand on his crumpled brow, and after a moment bent and kissed it.

He jerked his head away from her caress, opening and shutting his hands in a nervous way he had acquired in babyhood. "I've had a perfectly sickening time," he said. "There's a brute with a gramophone upstairs been driving me nearly crazy. For goodness' sake, see if you can put a stop to it before to-night comes! I shall go clean off my head if you don't!"

"I'll do my best, dear," Maud promised.

"I wish to goodness we could get away from this place," the boy said restlessly. "Even the old 'Anchovy' was preferable. I loathe this hole."