

## The Marriage of William Ashe

mine. It was what I deserved, of course; only just at that moment— If there is a God, William, how could He have let it happen so?"

The tears choked her. He left his seat, and, kneeling beside her, he raised her in his arms, while she murmured broken and anguished confessions.

"I was so weak—and frightened. And *he* said, it was no good trying to go back to you. Everybody knew I had gone to Verona—and he had followed me— No one would ever believe— And he wouldn't go—wouldn't leave me. It would be mere cruelty and desertion, he said. My real life was—with him. And I seemed— paralyzed. Who *had* sent that message? It never occurred to me— I felt as if some demon held me—and I couldn't escape—"

And again the sighs and tears, which wrung his heart—with which his own mingled. He tried to comfort her; but what comfort could there be? They had been the victims of a crime as hideous as any murder; and yet—behind the crime—there stretched back into the past the preparations and antecedents by which they themselves, alack, had contributed to their own undoing. Had they not both trifled with the mysterious test of life—he no less than she? And out of the dark had come the axe-stroke that ended weakness, and crushes the unsteeled, inconstant will.

After long silence, she began to talk in a rambling, delirious way of her months in Bosnia. She spoke of the *cold*—of the high mountain loneliness—of the terrible sights she had seen—till he drew her, shuddering, closer into his arms. And yet there was that in her