

"I can't bear to see you wearing your youth out in that incessant, sordid kind of toil," he said passionately.

"My youth! Oh, it's gone long since. I'm twenty-six," she answered lightly. "Besides, ordinarily I am quite happy and like Romsey Road immensely. They really are quite an amusing crowd—the staff, I mean. It's a little world all on its own, with heaps of comedy served up daily. Some day, when I am able to catch an inspiration from you, I'll write the 'Comedy of the County Council School.' I'm sure it would go down. Don't you think so?"

She was merely parrying with him—saying anything that occurred to her at the moment which might serve to stave off forbidden themes, while all the time she was keeping a strict look-out for her motor-bus.

"You've got to listen to me, Estelle, and to answer me, too. Won't you marry me? If I had you beside me all the time, I'm sure I could write the book that you are always talking to me about. I feel that I have it in me."

"Marriage is fatal to genius," answered Estelle; "domesticity is its sworn foe. And it doesn't allure me, either. I'd liefer teach the Romsey Road kids than keep house any day! It would bore me to extinction in a week."

"Not if you cared——" he began.

Then Estelle turned to him and looked quite calmly and pointedly into his face.

"But I don't care, Eugene—at least, not to that extent. Marriage is a big thing—certainly the biggest that comes in a woman's way. It's too full of risks, and it might easily transform me into a fiend! I'm not taking these risks at present."

It was a very chilly answer to a sincere and impassioned offer; but Woods accepted it courageously. His love was no mushroom growth, but, on the contrary,