

the freak had suddenly seized her to enhance her importance by asserting her independence even of the Clives. Who can tell, either, whether some qualm of uneasiness, some vague fear of Caryl's influence over her, may not also have moved her, or that Guy's warm advocacy of the claims of her step-children had not a certain weight? At any rate, on the prompting of the moment she spoke, dismaying, almost equally, her friends and foes. For against such a proof of her wavering and fickle favour neither Helen nor Caryl were any more prepared than was Guy for becoming custodian of so large a slice of her fortune.

"I will not undertake it!" the clergyman declared. "Think of the charges, the suspicion to which I should lay myself open! And to keep the matter a secret also!"

"So that's the way you show your regard for your pals, is it?" scoffed the widow. "One moment declaring I am likely to leave them penniless, and the next refusing to keep charge of a nest *legg* for them. Well, take it or leave it, *hit's* all one to me. I'll *not* have *hany* one told though, because then *hall* the world would think I meant to gamble and speculate away the rest. So there! And if you don't choose to *haccept* my conditions never mind. It'll be *hanother* two thousand for the Zarina!"

And now Guy was upon the horns of a very pretty dilemma, which the gleam that he had caught for a second in Caryl's eyes, as the last few words were uttered, by no means tended to simplify. Absolutely certain was the young clergyman that, whatever sums might be flung into the jaws of that gold mine, not one penny would ever be disgorged. And he could not forget that Jack had relied upon him to save what might be preserved out of this wreck which he had partly foreseen. Yet it was clear that to have any share in the pecuniary arrangements of Mrs. Brookes, to be concerned—for so malicious tongues might construe the matter—in the plundering of that wilfully blind victim, might prove as much and more

than the worth of his reputation. Could he, ought he so to stake his good name?

"You can, of course, give me a receipt for the *hamount*, made out in any form you please," said Mrs. Brookes, who had been watching his changing countenance with some curiosity.

As to Caryl and Helen, they had struggled to maintain a cautious semblance of neutrality, feeling silence to be a safer course than speech. But to Caryl 'live it was that Mrs. Brookes now appealed.

"You would not *hesitate*, Mr. Clive?" she said, a smile gathering about her thick lips. Little as she gauged the depth of his duplicity and covetousness, even she felt very certain that Caryl would never refuse to handle offered money. Nor did he make any attempt to alter her opinion, perhaps because he felt that, upon this occasion, honesty would best suit his purpose.

"My dear friend, I hesitate to oblige you? Never!"

"I will do as you wish," Guy said very quietly, at the same instant. And under his breath he added, "For Stella and Jack."

"Then *and hover* the cheque book. Why," with a face of dismay as she opened the cover, "there is but one left; and I was *habsolutely* certain I *ad* two."

She glanced up at the self-elected financier, who, however, only shook his head.

"I cannot say, dear lady; I have not looked. It has lived in here," displaying



"HE INSULTS ME!"