

"It isn't. I'm sure she wants you to marry Miss Melrose. And I thought at first—you seem very intimate."

"Naturally. Our intimacy began when she was eight and I was twelve." He spoke looking out across the stream. Something in him winced at her allusion to Sheila in that connection. But it was only fair on her to explain things; and he forced himself to proceed. "Her people are our nearest neighbours in Hampshire. Her mother's the sort of person who subsists chiefly on fads and philanthropy—the kind of philanthropy that makes you abominate charity and all its works. When we lost . . . Ailsa, my little sister, Mother sort of annexed Sheila, unofficially. But that doesn't imply—that she expects me to do likewise. We're devoted to her—both of us. She's a splendid little person"; he turned now and spoke with greater naturalness and warmth. "Not very easy to know. But *real*, right through. You're bound to love her. There—are you satisfied?" Without warning he slipped an arm round her. "Will you give me my answer now?"

He felt her yield under pressure of his hand: then, with a sudden enchanting simplicity, she lifted her face to his——

Presently she sighed; pushed him from her a little and looked steadily into his eyes—blue, like her own, but a deeper, tenderer shade, shot through with fine radiations of orange. Hers seemed still to hold a question. His were purely exultant.

"Darling, we've done it now," he said under his breath.

"Yes. I suppose—we have," she answered in the same key.

"Suppose? You're not going back on things, after *that*. Next question is—when will you marry me? Next week?"

Her flush, that had died down, mounted again,