

## T H E   W I L D   O L I V E

heads, as though they had witnessed the bestowal of a sacrament. To Miriam herself it was the seal set on a past that could never be reopened. She felt the definiteness with which it was ended, as she heard, on her way back to Conquest's side, the door slammed, while the cab lumbered away. It seemed to her that Conquest shrank from her as she approached him.

"You'll come to-morrow? I shall be home about five."

Conquest had put her into her motor, drawn the rugs about her, and closed the door. As he did so, she noticed something slow and broken in his movements. Leaning from the open window, she held out her hand, but he barely touched it.

"No," he said, hoarsely, "I shall not come to-morrow."

"Then, the next day."

"No, nor the next day."

"Well, when you can. If you let me know, I shall stay in, whenever it may be."

"You needn't stay in. I'm not coming any more."

"Oh, don't say that. Don't say that," she pleaded. "You hurt me."

"I can't come, Miriam. Don't you see? Isn't it plain enough? I can't come. I thought I could. I tried to think I could hold you—in spite of everything. But I can't. I *can't*."

"You can hold me—if I stay. I want to stay. You mustn't let me go. I want you to be happy. You deserve it. You've done so much for me—and *him*."

It was the stress she laid on the last word—a suggestion of something triumphant and enraptured beyond restraint—that made him bound back to the centre of the pavement.