

"But," I remonstrated, "I'm bound to see her sooner or later."

The nurse lost patience. "*Ach! Wie dumm sind die Männer!* Can't you get it into your head that it is essential it should be later, when she is strong enough to stand the strain and has realised the worst and made her little preparations?"

I accepted the rebuke meekly. The situation, when explained, was comprehensible to the meanest masculine intelligence.

"I will go," said I.

When I announced this determination to Lola she breathed a deep sigh of relief.

"I shall be so much happier," she said.

Then she raised both her arms and drew my head down until our lips met. "Dear," she whispered, still holding me, "if I hadn't run away from you before I should run away now; but it would be so silly to do it twice. So I'll come to London as soon as the doctor will let me. But if you find you don't and can't possibly love me I shan't feel hurt with you. I've had some months, I know, of your love, and that will last me all my life; and I know that whatever happens you'll be my very dear and devoted friend."

"I shall be your lover always!" I swore.

She shook her head and released me. A great pity welled up in my heart, for I know now why she had forbidden me to speak of marriage, and in some dim way I got to the depth of her woman's nature. I realised, as far as a man can, how the sudden blasting of a woman's beauty must revolutionise not only her own attitude towards the world, but her conception of the world's attitude towards her. Only a few weeks before she had gone about proudly conscious of her superb magnificence. It was the triumphant weapon in her woman's armoury, to use when she so chose. It