

"But she did it so wantonly, so irresponsibly; what reparation does she propose?"

"To immediately make a public confession that her charge against me was utterly false," replied John, strangely moved to speak defensively for Marien.

"She will do that?" exclaimed Bessie, her face alive with excitement and intense relief.

"She would have done it," answered John, "but I forbade her."

"Forbade her? Oh, John!" The soft eyes looked amazement and reproach.

"Yes," acknowledged John in a steady voice. "You see, her word would become instantly worthless. To be believed, her confession would have to be supported by the naming of the real thief."

"And is the saving of a thief worth more to you than your church — good name — your — your everything?"

"In my conception, yes," John answered seriously. "That is what I have a church, a name, everything, for; to use it all in saving people — or in helping them, if the other is too strong a word."

As her lover spoke in this lofty, detached, meditative tone, Bessie held him off and studied him. This was the new John Hampstead speaking; the man she did not know; the man who, up to the hour when cruel scandal smirched it, had stirred this community with the example of his life. Before this new man she felt her very soul bowing. She had loved the old John. She adored the new.

"Oh, John! How brave! How strong! How right you are!" she exclaimed, with a note of adoration in her voice.

A pang of self-reproach shot through the big man.

"Not so brave — not so strong as I must — as I ought