

a few days when an urgent summons came from his mother, the Countess. Before leaving Portsmouth, Jack had wired his father of his intended visit to Devonshire, and had given his address. The summons was in the form of a telegram. It read: "Come home at once. Your father is at the point of death."

"You must come with me, Bertha," said Jack. "Your place is by my side. I know my mother will receive you as a daughter. If my father has any objections to our marriage, it is too late to prevent it, but I wish his forgiveness, if he thinks such an act necessary, before he dies."

The Earl of Noxton's illness had not been of long duration, but he had suffered intense pain. Nature, at last, had succumbed in so far as to offer no further resistance to the inroads of disease; instead, there had come that physical peace and that lucid interval which so often precede dissolution.

As Jack had presaged, the Countess welcomed Bertha warmly.

"She is beautiful, is she not, mother?" asked Jack when they were alone.

"Yes," said the Countess, "and she is poor. When I was married to your father he said I was beautiful, and I was poor."

"You are beautiful now, mother," said Jack, as he embraced her. "But Bertha is not poor. I thought she was, for her guardian told me so, but it turns out that she is rich."

The three sat by the bedside of the dying man. The Earl of Noxton fixed his eyes intently upon Bertha.

"Who is she, John?" he asked, in a faint voice.

"She is my wife, father."

"Ah, I remember, you told me about her. You said she was beautiful. I can see that for myself, but you also told me that she was poor. Well, your mother was both beautiful and poor when I married her, and I have