

"Then you are bluffing?"

"I am. I want you so desperately."

He attempted to kiss her, but she repulsed him gently.

"If mother knew——"

"She need not know. Your father will climb down at the last moment. He knows, and Tamlin knows, that I can ruin both of them."

"It's as bad as that?"

"Yes. He must surrender!"

"But if he shouldn't? Jim, dear, you said last night that you would take me as I am; and I loved you for saying that. Now, you want to bargain for me."

"To bargain for you, darling; not for myself."

She nodded, accepting his explanation, able to put herself in his place. Beholding the situation from his point of view, panoramically, she tried, in turn, to see the same situation from the point of view of her father. She exclaimed softly:

"Gracious!"

The expression upon her face puzzled James. Men, even the cleverest, can follow women's bodies easier than their thoughts.

"Try to be sensible about this," he murmured.

"It's so exciting. Don't you see that this is a test of father, a wonderful test!"

"Of what?"

"Of his love for me, of his love for mother."

"Eh?"

"Don't be dense, Jim! Mother has accused