

CORRODING GOLD

Strange how the real gift, which is destined to illumine the life, sometimes comes to full growth so slowly that in its initial stages it is apt to be unrecognised!

Woods was just beginning the literary life, and had not as yet had even sufficient success to encourage him to go on.

Estelle knew all this, and she was deeply interested in his progress, but nothing more.

She was perfectly well aware, being one of the quickest and most observant of women, that Eugene was in love with her. But that knowledge did not disturb her very much. She had the idea that she would never marry. Certainly she had no wish to marry Eugene. He was, in her opinion, too much of a big child.

Something in the atmosphere disturbed her at that moment, and, turning her clear, fine eyes to him, she caught the expression in his, and she began to quicken her steps, reddening furiously. She had no wish to receive a proposal of marriage from Eugene Woods in the Romsey Road at four of the afternoon.

"I think I'll take a bus," she said, with an odd, unusual nervousness. "I was forgetting that mother has a tea-fight on this afternoon, and I promised to get home quickly."

"Presently, Estelle. Don't grudge me these few minutes," he said desperately, fearing to lose his opportunity. "I've something to ask you. Don't you think that two people could live together comfortably on two hundred and fifty pounds a year in a little house a little farther out from the city, perhaps—as near to the fringe of the country as would be possible for a man who has to earn his living in London?"

"I dare say. Thousands have to do it on less," answered Estelle, speaking at random.