

you did, and I wanted to find out. It is such a very awkward position, isn't it?"

"Awkward! What an epithet for sheer tragedy; but the hearer felt silenced from overt criticism by those hard blue eyes. It would be useless she felt to say anything."

"Rather awkward," assented Isobel coldly, hoping to check the conversation.

But Mrs. Vansittart was, like most convalescents, garrulous.

"I think it is very hard on me," she continued plaintively. "It puts me under such an obligation and he has no business to do that. It is on a par with his not marrying again—" she moved restlessly, and Isobel settled her pillows, her lips set with anger. "You see," went on the pretty plaintive voice, "it was really very unkind of him, for there was no real reason why he shouldn't; and men generally do. It would have made me so much happier—happy as I was with my lost one"—here the tears began to roll down the pretty cheeks that were fast recovering their roundness, their pinkness. "And it isn't as if we were ever fond of one another. He married me just to take care of me, I'm sure, and I was so young and I wanted a protector. It was very wrong, of course; but I didn't understand what love was then. Besides I wasn't the sort of wife for him at all. He requires someone not so good-looking and more reliable—a girl more like you—what is the matter, nurse, you've upset the eau-de-cologne?"

More than that was upset, and those clear complacent eyes took in the fact with a certain amusement; having lived on simulated emotion all her life, she was quick to recognise the real thing.

"You came out with John in the same ship," said Mrs. Vansittart the next day. "He told me." And then suddenly, without warning, she remarked coolly. "Why don't you marry him, Miss Graham? I'm sure he wants you to—now doesn't he?"

"Really! Mrs Vansittart!" began Isobel hotly, then paused, feeling frankly that it was useless to try and get inside that armour of unconscious selfishness. "I don't suppose you will understand," she continued haughtily, "but I hold it wrong for divorced persons to marry; and no matter how I loved a man—"

"Then you do love him," interrupted the sweet womanly voice. "I am so glad. And I quite understand—quite! I wouldn't do it myself—I—I wouldn't indeed, for I think just as you do—and of course real love is divine in its origin, only—" there was a pause and a distinct air of virtue crept over the pretty face—"Miss Graham! I'm going to tell you something in the strictest confidence, that I've never told to anyone before—not even to John himself; but you have been so kind to me, and he says you saved my life. So I want you to be happy—and oh! don't I know it!" (the tears rose easily) "love is happiness. The fact is—I can hardly bear even to say it—I—I never was married to John at all."

The very walls of the room seemed to rock and close in on Isobel Graham's amazement.

"Not married?"

"No! I thought I was of course. Surely I need hardly say that! But when I met Dr. Forde I was a widow—such a young widow, and quite forlorn. The man I had married was perfect wretch and had deserted me, and I'd seen his death in the papers. But he wasn't really dead then. After I had been married three years, he wrote me a letter, and you can't think Miss Graham how awful it was! I didn't know what to do. I couldn't face my friends; and I was the centre of such a charming society; everyone admired me! So I sent him money; and then he really did die. It was such a relief. But still I couldn't be happy. I know I was not really married, and I couldn't tell John. And then my darling—he was John's best friend which made it so hard, you know—came into my life and it all seemed so dreadful, so truly dreadful. And then this story about that other woman turned up. I don't know if it was true; perhaps it wasn't but in India it is so common you know fact quite unmoved.

"—and John was miserable—I saw I was ruining his life—and you see, I hadn't any right to do that—no right at all—"

"But by this time Isobel Graham had recovered herself.

"So you divorced him knowing he was not guilty?"

"How could he be guilty when we weren't married?" asked Mrs. Vansittart

pettishly. "You don't understand. He didn't really mind; besides if he had, he wouldn't really have had the right either. It was all so confused—and any how I did it for the best—I did indeed."

Isobel Graham stood speechless, her hands pressed to her forehead. Confused! The word did not express the utter obfuscation of thought which was hers. John Forde was undoubtedly free; but on the other hand he had not known he was free. All his actions stood in the same light as they had done before—or did they not? She could not decide, she could not think. She could only say with what purpose was left to her—

"Thank you, that is enough. If you say any more, I will go out of the room."

Only one thing seemed clear to her on reflection. John Forde, whatever his faults, had been shamefully betrayed by the woman he believed to be his wife. To save her own petty self-esteem she had accused him of a crime—at least of something—of which, possibly, he was not guilty; and she had certainly branded him as a divorced man. He had acquiesced—more shame to him; but for all that she, Isobel Graham, had misjudged him as the rest of the world misjudged him and now, knowing the truth, she owed him an apology. So much seemed clear.

He was booted and spurred for his ride across the desert when she began her stammering ambiguous words. He cut them short with a tightened clasp of the hand he held in good-bye greeting.

"So Helen has told you the truth," he said swiftly, his face lighting up, his quick genius for diagnosis coming to his aid unerringly. "Hasn't she?"

"She told me," began Isobel cautiously, remembering the confidential character of her knowledge, but again he was too alert for her, and his face softened.

"Poor soul," he said gently. "I hardly expected she ever would. It isn't in her, you see. And it was desperately hard and rough on her—"

"Then you know?" faltered Isobel, "you knew all the time—"

"Of course I knew. The man wrote to me also; and I was just going to speak to Helen when the beast—he was a beast—died. And then—then it was for her to decide—you see, my dear, I—I am not very orthodox I'm afraid—marriage or no marriage didn't trouble me much. She wasn't happy, I wasn't happy—our so-called marriage was a mistake; but I felt bound to her, so I left it to her. I was a bit flabbergasted at her method of shunting me, I own. But it didn't seem to matter really; you see I never expected you would come along, my dear—take care, child!"

For Isobel Graham had collapsed hopelessly at the very feet of the strong square man, and was weeping silently as she looked up in his kindly face.

"Poor little woman," he said as he stooped to raise her and hold her fast—"You see I couldn't tell you, could I—besides—" a slight sadness came to his voice, "you condemned me unheard! However! That's over, I suppose?"

"Yes! it's over," said Isobel Graham in a muffled voice—her lips were pressed on the lapel of John Forde's white drill coat, just above his heart—"but I wish you hadn't—no!—John! you are the best, the kindest—"

The doctor pushed her from him in alarm, and looked anxiously in her face. "You don't feel ill do you? No! that's all right. I thought you were talking a bit wild, that's all."

SUBTRACTION.

Aunt Dorothy: How many commandments are there. Johnny?

Johnny (glitely): Ten.

Aunt Dorothy: And now suppose you were to break one of them?

Johnny (tentatively): Then there'd be nine.

NOTICE

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