

The parts were suddenly reversed. The woman who had been of no importance in the drama now took the lead. Geraldine had never seen so slight a figure with so much dignity. Her artistic sense was charmed; the voice of Howard's wife talking of love was so tender that she was silent with astonishment.

"You love my husband," she continued in her characteristic affirmative way. "So do I—and those who love Howard love him very thoroughly. But your right and mine can never be equal—I am his wife. Do come and rest here by the fire, Miss Ward; you are worn out with fatigue."

Geraldine, as though under the spell of the bright grey eyes, moved slowly to the chair she had vacated and sat down. The fire had burned down to a steady glow. In the partial darkness Geraldine asked: "Does a man's love give a woman no right?"

Caroline hurriedly piled on the pine cones. Again the sparks flew out, and she, kneeling, picked them quickly from the rug and Geraldine's skirts.

"Love gives prerogatives—honour holds the right! You have been brave to come here to-night, Miss Ward—I understand what it has cost you to invade my dominion—you are good, noble; I trusted to you when I most feared you, when your beauty robbed me, and I hated you. Still I trusted you—and if women only knew, their hope is in the woman after all, for when the man forgets her, he is cruel in his forgetfulness! It is so absolute, so indifferent to all claims! But a woman, in remembering her own womanhood, grants the other woman's right."

The cones crackled and burst into blaze, revealing the two faces again.

"If there was nothing but love's prerogatives, I would gladly change places with you, Miss Ward. The wife's right has been barren of joy! There! Does that confession match yours? We are both proud."

Geraldine bent forward, and took the delicate cold hands.

"Dear," she said, realising how she had

misunderstood, how far from comprehension, Howard had been, "forgive me! My thought has been all about myself—and *him*."

Caroline winced at the appropriation which the personal pronoun signified.

"He called to me once," concluded Geraldine, "and I mocked him—how can I leave him to a second despair?"

"You can leave him to me."

"But——?"

Caroline's gesture was imperative. She rose from her knees.

"It was not I who failed him," she said, distinctly, "it was you. I never have failed him." Her brow contracted. She walked as Geraldine had done to the window, and looked out into the darkness. For a moment she stood in silence, fighting with her emotion, but it was getting the mastery. "Do you imagine that you can teach me anything of love that I do not comprehend? Any largeness or smallness of my husband which I do not know? You imagine that I have been barred in by coldness away from it all—that I have lacked the intelligence of sympathy. I know every longing that has torn him—every passionate regret, the disillusionments, the ripening of his character!" She turned from the window, and came back to the hearth, her face illuminated by the spiritual passion of her avowal, which meant so much from a nature so reserved. She held out her hands with a dramatic gesture of appeal. "I have died with him daily."

Geraldine was beginning to perceive the truth, to be initiated into a tenderness and devotion against which she could not protest.

"You think my husband's need is all dark and unintelligible to me," Caroline proceeded. "And you come to show me how to make life tolerable to him, how to beguile him from the shallows and quicksands of his own seeking, his deliberate seeking. A passion of pity has moved you from your just estimate—your first estimate—that a god cannot compensate a woman for the loss of her ideal self."