

Literature.org:  
[Authors](#)  
[Contact](#)

[The Malefactor](#)

[Book 2](#)

This Work:  
[Contents](#)  
[Previous Book](#)

[E. Phillips Oppenheim](#)

Book 2:  
[Contents](#)  
[Previous Chapter](#)  
[Next Chapter](#)

Chapter 16 - For Pity's Sake

---

The library at Tredowen was a room of irregular shape, full of angles and recesses lined with bookcases. It was in one of these, standing motionless before a small marble statue of some forgotten Greek poet, that Wingrave found his visitor. She wore a plain serge traveling dress, and the pallor of her face, from which she had just lifted a voluminous veil, matched almost in color the gleaming white marble upon which she was gazing. But when she saw Wingrave, leaning upon his stick, and regarding her with stern surprise, strange lights seemed to flash in her eyes. There was no longer any resemblance between the pallor of her cheeks and the pallor of the statue.

"Lady Ruth," Wingrave said quietly, "I do not understand what has procured for me the pleasure of this unexpected visit."

She swayed a little towards him. Her head was thrown back, all the silent passion of the inexpressible, the hidden secondary forces of nature, was blazing out of her eyes, pleading with him in the broken music of her tone.

"You do not understand," she repeated. "Ah, no! But can I make you understand? Will you listen to me for once as a human being? Will you remember that you are a man, and I a woman pleading for a little mercy--a little kindness?"

Wingrave moved a step further back.

"Permit me," he said, "to offer you a chair."

She sank into it--speechless for a moment. Wingrave stood over her, leaning slightly against the corner of the bookcase.

"I trust," he said, "that you will explain what all this means. If it is my help which you require--"

Her hands flashed out towards him--a gesture almost of horror.

"Don't," she begged, "you know that it is not that! You know very well that it is not. Why do you torture me?"

"I can only ask you," he said, "to explain."

She commenced talking quickly. Her sentences came in little gasps.

"You wanted revenge--not in the ordinary way. You had brooded over it too long. You understood too well. Once it was I who sought to revenge myself on you because you would not listen to me! You hurt my pride. Everything that was evil in me rebelled--"

"Is this necessary?" he interrupted coldly. "I have never reproached you. You chose the path of safety for yourself. Many another woman in your place would doubtless have done the same thing! What I desire to know is why you are here in Cornwall. What has happened to make this journey seem necessary to you?"

"Listen!" she continued. "I want you to know how thoroughly you have succeeded. Before you came, Lumley and I were living together decently enough, and, as hundreds of others live, with outside interests for our chief distraction. You came, a friend! You were very subtle, very skillful! You never spoke a word of affection to me, but you managed things so that--people talked. You encouraged Lumley to speculate--not in actual words, perhaps, but by suggestion. Then you lent me money. Lumley, my husband, let me borrow from you. Everyone knew that we were ruined; everyone knew where the money came from that set us right. So misery has been piled upon misery. Lumley has lost his self respect, he is losing his ambition, he is deteriorating every day. I--how can I do anything else but despise him? He let me, his wife, come to your rooms to borrow money from you. Do you think I can ever forget that? Do you think that he can? Don't you know that the memory of it is dragging us apart, must keep us apart always--always?"

Wingrave leaned a little forward. His hands were clasped upon the handle of his stick.

"All that you tell me," he remarked coldly, "might equally well have been said in London! I do not wish to seem inhospitable, but I am still waiting to know why you have taken an eight hours' journey to recite a few fairly obvious truths. Your relations with your husband, frankly, do not interest me. The deductions which society may have drawn concerning our friendship need scarcely trouble you, under the circumstances."

Then again the light was blazing in her eyes.

"Under the circumstances!" she repeated. "I know what you mean. It is true that you have asked for nothing. It is true that all this time you have never spoken a single word which all the world might not hear, you have never even touched my fingers, except as a matter of formality. Once I was the woman you loved--and I--well you know! Is this part of your scheme of torture, to play with me as though we were marionettes, you and I, with sawdust in our veins, dull, lifeless puppets! Well, it is finished--your vengeance! You may reap the harvest when you will! Publish my letters, prove yourself an injured man. Take a whip in your hand if you like, and I will never flinch. But, for heaven's sake, remember that I am a woman! I am willing to be your slave, nurse you, wait upon you, follow you about! What more can your vengeance need? You have made me despise my husband, you have made me hate my life with him! You have forced me into a remembrance of what I have never really forgotten--and oh! Wingrave," she added, opening her arms to him with a little sob, "if you send me away, I think that I shall kill myself. Wingrave!"

There was a note of despair in her last cry. Her arms fell to her side. Wingrave was on his way to the further end of the room. He rang the bell and turned towards her.

"Listen," he said calmly, "you will return to London tonight. If ever I require you, I shall send for you--and you will come. At present I do not. You will return to your

husband. Understand!"

"Yes," she gasped, "but--"

He held out his hand. Morrison was at the door.

"Morrison," he said, "you will order the motor to be round in half an hour to take Lady Ruth to Truro. She has to catch the London express. You will go with her yourself, and see that she has a reserved carriage. If, by any chance, you should miss the train, order a special."

"Very good, sir."

"And tell the cook to send in tea and wine, and some sandwiches, in ten minutes."

Once more they were alone. Lady Ruth rose slowly to her feet and, trembling in every limb, she walked down the room and fell on her knees before Wingrave.

"Wingrave," she said, "I will go away. I will do all that you tell me; I will wear my chains bravely, and hold my peace. But before I go, for heaven's sake, say a kind word, look at me kindly, kiss me, hold my hands; anything, anything, anything to prove to me that you are not a dead man. I could bear unkindness, reproaches, abuse. I can bear anything but this deadly coldness. It is becoming a horror to me! Do, Wingrave--do!"

She clasped his hand--he drew it calmly away.

"Lady Ruth," he said, "you have spoken the truth. I am a dead man. I have no affections; I care neither for you nor for any living being. All that goes to the glory and joy of life perished in that uncountable roll of days, when the sun went out, and inch by inch the wall rose which will divide me forever from you and all the world. Frankly, it was not I who once loved you. It was the man who died in prison. His flesh and bones may have survived--nothing else!"

She rose slowly to her feet. Her eyes seemed to be dilating.

"There is another woman!" she exclaimed softly. Her voice was like velvet, but the agony in her face was unmistakable.

"There is no other woman," he answered.

She stood quite still.

"She is here with you now," she cried. "Who is it, Wingrave? Tell me the truth!"

"The truth is already told," he answered. "Except my cook and her assistants, there is not a woman in the house!"

Again she listened. She gave a little hoarse cry, and Wingrave started. Out in the hall a girl's clear laugh rang like a note of music to their ears.

"You lie!" she cried fiercely. "You lie! I will know who she is."

Suddenly the door was thrown open! Juliet stood there, her hands full of roses, her face flushed and brilliant with smiles.

"How delightful to find you here!" she exclaimed, coming swiftly across to Wingrave. "I do hope you won't mind my coming. Normandy is off, and I have nowhere else to go."

She saw Lady Ruth and stopped.

"Oh! I beg your pardon!" she exclaimed. "I did not know."

"This is Lady Ruth Barrington," Wingrave said; "my ward, Miss Juliet Lundy."

"Your--ward?" Lady Ruth said, gazing at her intently.

Juliet nodded.

"Sir Wingrave has been very kind to me since I was a child," she said softly. "He has let me live here with Mrs. Tresfarwin, and I am afraid I sometimes forget that it is not really my home. Am I in the way?" she asked, looking wistfully towards Wingrave.

"By no means!" he exclaimed. "Lady Ruth is just going. Will you see that she has some tea or something?"

Lady Ruth laughed quietly.

"I think," she said, "that it is I who am in the way! I should love some tea, if there is time, but whatever happens, I must not miss that train."