

THE LETTER OF THE CONTRACT

to be right for me was the right thing for us both?"

"I think I should."

"Well, then, listen. It's this way. You know, Chip, I love you." She had his hand now in both of hers, twisting her fingers nervously in and out between his. "I don't have to tell you, do I? I love you. Oh, how I love you! It's as if the very heart had gone out of my body into yours. And yet, Chip—oh, don't be angry!—it seems to me that if I left him now and went back to you I should become something vile. It *isn't* because he's so noble and good. No, it isn't that. And it isn't just the idea of passing from one man to another and back again. We *have* turned marriage into opera bouffe, we Americans, and we might as well take it as we've made it. It isn't that at all. It's—it's exactly what you said just now: it's like a man swimming away from a sinking ship, and leaving his wife and children to drown, because he can't rescue them. Better a thousand times to go down with them, isn't it? You may call it waste of human material, if you like, and yet—well, you know what I mean. I should be leaving him to drown and you'd