

"I wish you would go, Simon. I do wish you would go!" she would say wearily. "It's the only favour I've ever asked you in my life."

Man-like, I looked within myself to find the reason for these earnest requests. In casting off my jester's suit had I also divested myself of the power to be a decently interesting companion? Had I become merely a dull, tactless, egotistical bore? Was I, in simple, naked, horrid fact, getting on an invalid's delicate nerves? I was scared of the new picture of myself thus presented. I became self-conscious and made particular efforts to bring a little gaiety into our talk; but though she smiled with her lips, the cloud, whatever it was, hung heavily on her mind, and at the first opportunity she came back to the ceaseless argument.

In despair I took her nurse into my confidence.

"She is right," said the nurse. "You are doing her more harm than good. You had much better go away and write to her daily from London."

"But why—but why?" I clamoured. "Can't you give me any reason?"

The nurse glanced at me with a touch of feminine scorn.

"The bandages will soon be removed."

"Well?" said I.

"The sight of the one eye may be gone."

"I know," said I. "She is reconciled to it. She has the courage and resignation of a saint."

"She has also the very common and natural fears of a woman."

"For Heaven's sake," I cried, "tell me plainly what you mean."

"We don't quite know what disfigurement will result," said the nurse bluntly. "It is certain to be very great, and the dread of your seeing her is making her ill and retarding her recovery. So if you have any regard for her, pack up your things and go away."