

mitted, that the idea of despatching one of the servants to the house was only momentarily entertained. And, true enough, the vehicle at length appeared. By this time Eloise had grown much stronger, and was even able to profess herself 'dreadfully ashamed,' which she did with so much pretty humility that the most unsympathetic observer would have had little heart to feel toward her anything except indulgent pity.

## II.

Six months had passed, and the same party, after a continued period of separation, were again to be found in Mrs. Ross's country-house. They had assembled there to spend Christmas. The spaciouly comfortable mansion had been decorated with a charming collection of greens throughout nearly all of its attractive chambers. Good cheer reigned everywhere, with a sweet sovereignty. It was Christmas day, briskly cold out of doors, but free from the snowy accompaniments common to this period. The household had met at a sumptuous-looking six o'clock dinner, which was still in progress. Reginald had scarcely spent six weeks at home during the months since we last saw him. It was somehow understood that he had been passing most of his time in New York, though he had been oddly reticent regarding his frequent and prolonged departures. For three days past, since the two guests, Austin and Willard had arrived, his manner had seemed to everyone unusually taciturn and preoccupied. To-day, during dinner, he scarcely spoke ten sentences. The occupants of the dining-room were all rising from dessert, when he whispered in Willard's ear:

'I want to have a short talk with you, Wallace.'

A few moments afterwards he and Wallace had quitted the house by a rear door and were strolling side-and-side along one of the more retired

paths of the lawn in the early winter starlight. It was not till now that Reginald gave his companion the least clue regarding what was to be the subject of their conversation.

'Wallace,' he rather measuredly began, looking straight before him, 'I hope you won't attempt to contradict me when I tell you that I am the weakest man of your acquaintance.'

'I shall require proof, however,' was the slow and rather dry answer.

'Proof!' exclaimed Reginald, looking all about him for a second as though to make sure of there being no unseen listener. 'Good heavens, my condition fairly teems with proof! You know I had been away for a little time before the accident from which you found me recovering last summer.'

'You had been fishing, I think you said—yes.'

'I had been falling in love.'

'Ah.'

'I had been falling in love—well, let me say it all—with two women.'

'That is serious. Was one a fisherman's wife and the other his ——?'

'Don't jest, please. I was never more serious than now. Can't you see it?'

If Willard had not seen it before, the look that Reginald here turned upon him was, indeed, well calculated to settle all doubt. 'No matter how long I was away, Wallace,' he went on, 'and no matter what opportunities I have had of fully observing these two women. Some of the facts are these: I have seen enough of both to understand their natures pretty thoroughly. Both are my social equals; both are unmarried. I love one—he paused now, and laid his hand heavily on Willard's shoulder, while his restless eyes dwelt for a moment on the other's face in solemn and appealing fixity—'I love one, Wallace, with my heart, and one with my soul. This has a very high flown sound to you, no doubt, but it is the only lucid way to put the matter, after all.'