

the light, she said abruptly: 'I have a painful question to ask.'

'What is it?'

Her eyes travelled slowly from the window to the Doctor's face. Without the slightest outward appearance of agitation, she put the 'painful question' in these extraordinary words:

'I want to know, if you please, whether I am in danger of going mad?'

Some men might have been amused, and some might have been alarmed. Dr. Wybrow was only conscious of a sense of disappointment. Was this the rare case he had anticipated, judging rashly by appearances? Was the new patient only a hypochondriacal woman whose malady was a disordered stomach, and whose misfortune was a weak brain? 'Why do you come to me, he asked sharply.' 'Why don't you consult a doctor whose special employment is the treatment of the insane?'

She had her answer ready on the instant.

'I don't go to a doctor of that sort,' she said, 'for the very reason that he is a specialist: he has the fatal habit of judging everybody by lines and rules of his own laying down. I come to you, because my case is outside of all lines and rules, and because you are famous in your profession for the discovery of mysteries in disease. Are you satisfied?'

He was more than satisfied—his first idea had been the right idea after all. Besides, she was correctly informed as to his professional position. The capacity which had raised him to fame and fortune, was his capacity (unrivalled among his brethren) for the discovery of remote disease.

'I am at your disposal,' he answered. 'Let me try if I can find out what is the matter with you.'

He put his medical questions. They were promptly and plainly answered; and they led to no other conclusion than that the strange lady was, mentally and physically, in excellent health.

Not satisfied with questions, he carefully examined the great organs of life. Neither his hand nor his stethoscope could discover anything that was amiss. With the admirable patience and devotion to his art which had distinguished him from the time when he was a student, he still subjected her to one test after another. The result was always the same. Not only was there no tendency to brain disease—there was not even a perceptible derangement of the nervous system. 'I can find nothing the matter with you,' he said. 'I can't even account for the extraordinary pallor of your complexion. You completely puzzle me.'

'The pallor of my complexion is nothing,' she answered a little impatiently. 'In my early life, I had a narrow escape from death by poisoning. I have never had a complexion since—and my skin is so delicate, I cannot paint without producing a hideous rash. But that is of no importance, I wanted your opinion given positively. I believed in you, and you have disappointed me.' Her head dropped on her breast. 'And so it ends!' she said to herself bitterly.

The Doctor's sympathies were touched. Perhaps it might be more correct to say that his professional pride was a little hurt. 'It may end in the right way yet,' he remarked, 'if you choose to help me.'

She looked up again with flashing eyes. 'Speak plainly,' she said. 'How can I help you?'

'Plainly, madam, you come to me as an enigma, and you leave me to make the right guess by the unaided efforts of my art. My art will do much, but not all. For example something must have occurred—something quite unconnected with the state of your bodily health—to frighten you about yourself, or you would never have come here to consult me. Is that not true?'

She clasped her hands in her lap. 'That is true!' she said eagerly. 'I begin to believe in you again.'