

"Do you suppose," he exclaimed, "that I yet understand in the least how it is that I am here, in this chair, with you beside me? You have told me much ancient history! — but all that truly concerns me this morning lies in the dark. The last time I saw you, you were standing at the garden-door, with a look which made me say to myself that I was the same blunderer I had always been, and had far best keep away. Bridge me the gap, please, between that hell and this heaven!"

She held her head high, and changed her look of softness for a frown.

"You had spoken of '*marriage!*'" she said. "Marriage in the abstract, with a big *M*. You did it in the tone of my guardian giving me away. Could I be expected to stand that?"

He laughed. The joy in the sound almost hurt her.

"So one's few virtues smite one," he said as he captured her hand again. "Will you acknowledge that I played my part well? I thought to myself, in the worst of tempers, as I drove away, that I could hardly have been more official. But all this is evasion. What I desire to know, categorically, is, what made you write that letter to me last night, after — after the day before?"

She sat with her chin on her hand, a smile dancing.

"Whom did you walk with yesterday afternoon?" she said slowly.

He looked bewildered.

"There!" she cried, with a sudden wild gesture; "when I have told you it will undo it all. Oh! if Frank had never said a word to me; if I had had no