

Maggie advanced into the room and turned up the gas, and the glare wounded his eyes.

"Yes," said Dr. Heve, at the end of three minutes. "You've got it. Not badly, I hope. But you've got it all right."

Humiliating! For the instinct of the Clayhangers was always to assume that by virtue of some special prudence, or immunity, or resisting power, peculiar to them alone, they would escape any popular affliction such as an epidemic. In the middle of the night, amid feverish tossings and crises of thirst, and horrible malaise, it was more than humiliating! Supposing he died? People did die of influenza. The strangest, the most monstrous things did happen. For the first time in his life he lay in the genuine fear of death. He had never been ill before. And now he was ill. He knew what it was to be ill. The stupid, blundering clumsiness of death aroused his angry resentment. No! It was impossible that he should die! People did not die of influenza.

The next day the doctor laughed. But Edwin said to himself: "He may have laughed only to cheer me up. They never tell their patients the truth." And every cell of his body was vitiated, poisoned, inefficient, profoundly demoralized. Ordinary health seemed the most precious and the least attainable boon.

II

After wildernesses of time that were all but interminable, the attack was completely over. It had lasted a hundred hours, of which the first fifty had each been an age. It was a febrile attack similar to George's, but less serious. Edwin had possibly caught the infection at Knype Railway Station: yet who could tell? Now he was in the drawing-room, shaved, clothed, but wearing slippers for a sign that he was only convalescent, and because the doctor had forbidden him the street. He sat in front of the fire, in the easy chair that had been his father's favourite. On his left hand were an accumulation of newspapers and a book; on his right, some business letters and documents left by the assiduous Stifford after a visit of sympathy and of affairs. The declining sun shone with weak goodwill on the garden.