

In a few moments the lady entered the parlor. As Mr. Miller presented Batterby to his wife, Ephraim was shocked to perceive that she seemed to have on but a single, thin, white garment, and that even appeared to be in immediate danger of slipping downward. He thought it shockingly immodest, but he remembered the figures of women he had seen in the remote past, and thought he knew what this meant. So he gave no indication of surprise.

They went to the dining-room. Ephraim was very careful in conducting his share of the conversation. Mrs. Miller, unlike her husband, had not been forewarned. However, once, when she was lamenting the absence of fruits and vegetables from the markets in winter, Ephraim incautiously asked her why she did not use canned goods; and this opened the way to some vexatious questions. A little later, Miller began talking about the Warners, people whom Ephraim in his soul knew had been dead forty years; and Miller had mentioned that two of them were down with small-pox. Thereupon Ephraim asked if the malady was prevalent, and if Miller had been vaccinated. And thus again he got into trouble, for neither his host nor hostess knew his meaning. He was tripped up again by a reference to sewing-machines; and, finally, by remarking, innocently, when Miller observed that it had just begun to rain, that he was sorry he had not his rubbers with him.

But he would not try to explain his meaning when they pressed him. He had, indeed, an increasing tendency to taciturnity. He shrank more and more from the thought of attempting a discussion of the situation in which some wondrous mischance had placed him. As Miller waxed boisterous and lively in his talk, Ephraim was strongly impelled to complete reserve.

For he had creeping over him, gradually, a horrible feeling that these people, in whose company he was lingering, were not real people; that they were dead, and that by some awful jugglery they had been summoned forth and compelled to play over, before him, a travesty of their former lives.

He became gloomy and wretched beneath the oppression of the thoughts that crowded his brain. As the hour slipped away, his distress was made more intense by the conduct of Miller, who, warmed with wine, mingled oaths with his conversation. Ephraim felt as if that blasphemy came to him clothed with a