

all these years! . . . Will I tell you what I mean? Yes, dear, if you'll be quiet and listen."

"Will you go on?"

Mrs. Eldridge braces herself up to consecutive narrative, as in response to unreasonable impatience. "There was a marriage. That's understood—I mean your sister's with her first husband. And it was kept dark. . . ."

"I wish you wouldn't talk as if it was the Criminal Classes. Go on!"

"I can't if you interrupt. Well!—Mr. Challis was quite a young man then, and a friend of the first husband's, and she was young. You see?"

"I see their youngness would make it all the worse, instead of better. If it was true! But it isn't." At this point Marianne gives up the attempt to engineer the hair-pin. "Can't you stop stopping, Charlotte, and go on?"

Charlotte deserts the extreme of deliberation for irritating rapidity and conciseness. "The first husband may have been anything, for anything we know of him. Only, there must have been a reason for their parting, if you think of it. Within a few months! Now suppose—don't be in a rage, Marianne dear, it doesn't do any good!—suppose your husband was the reason! Of course, he would never tell you, if Kate never did. . . ."

"I was a child!"

"I don't think anything of that. Children are easier to tell than half-grown-up people. Remember, too, as time went on, how much harder it would get to tell. Fancy his beginning to speak of it! How would he? Come, Marianne!" And Marianne's silence admitted that she felt the difficulty her husband would have had in publishing for private circulation an early transgression of his own—and Bob's mother, please! It may all have been, and yet Titus may have done rightly to let bygones be bygones. That was her thought at the moment, but it jumped gladly at leave to go when further speech of Charlotte's brought a respite: "Of course, the obstacle to accounting for it this way is the divorce. It seems impossible there should have been a divorce, and your mother never heard of it!"

"Why, of course, Charlotte! What nonsense it all