

Cicely blushed, and Hester, smiling, pressed her hand.

'Then you're not going to Rome?'

'Certainly I am! But one has to give occasional sops to the domestic tyrant.'

They sauntered back to tea in Hester's garden by the river, and there the talk of her three guests was more equal and unfettered, more of a real interchange, than Hester ever remembered it. Of old, Farrell had been the guardian and teacher, indoctrinating Nelly with his own views on art, reading to her from his favourite poets, or surrounding her in a hundred small matters with a playful and devoted homage. But now in the long wrestle with her grief and remorse, she had thought, as well as felt. She was as humble and simple as ever, but her companions realised that she was standing on her own feet. And this something new in her—which was nothing but a strengthened play of intelligence and will—had a curious effect on Farrell. It seemed to bring him out, also; so that the nobler aspects of his life, and the nobler proportions of his character shewed themselves, unconsciously. Hester, with anxious joy, guessed at the beginnings of a new moral relation, a true comradeship, between himself and Nelly, such as there had never yet been—which might go far. It masked the depths in both of them; or rather it was a first bridge thrown over the chasm between them. What would come of it?

Again she rebuked herself even for the question.