

own position and the means he was taking to preserve it, should in two or three days begin to desert him, and should now in this hour openly range themselves against him and on her side; so that all he invoked to aid him pleaded for her, all that he had prayed to bless him and his enterprise blessed her and cursed the work to which he had put his hand.

Which of them could best face the world without Blent? Which of them could best look the world in the face having Blent? These were the questions that rose in his mind with tempestuous insistence.

"I could sit here for ever," she murmured, a lazy enjoyment succeeding to the agile movements of her body and the delighted agitation of her nerves. "It just suits me to sit here, cousin Harry. Looking like a great lady!" Her eyes challenged him to deny that she looked the part to perfection. She glanced through the window. "I met that funny little Madame Zabriska who lives up at Merriem Lodge to-day. She seems very anxious to know all about us."

"Madame Zabriska has a healthy—or unhealthy—curiosity." The mention of Mina was a new prick. Mina knew; suddenly he hated that she should know.

"Is she in love with you?" asked Cecily, mockingly, yet languidly, indeed as a great lady might inquire about the less exalted, condescending to be amused.

"Nobody's in love with me, not even the girl who's going to marry me."

"To marry you?" She sat up, looking at him. "Are you engaged?"

"Yes, to Janie Iver. You know who I mean?"

"Yes, I know. You're going to be married to her?"

"I asked her a week ago. To-day she wrote to say she'd have me." He was on his feet even as he spoke. "To marry me and to marry all this, you know."

She was too sympathetic to waste breath on civil pretences.

"To be mistress here? To own this? To be Lady Tristram of Blent?"

"Yes. To have what—what I'm supposed to have," said he.