

"Yes. If I could understand that, I should understand everything. Once, long ago, Walter said the same thing to me, and I couldn't understand."

"Well—well, it depends on what one calls unfaithfulness. Some men are brutes, but we're not talking about them. We're talking about Walter."

"Yes. We're talking about Walter."

"And Walter is my dearest friend, so dear that I hardly know how to talk to you about him."

"Try," she said.

"Well, I suppose I know more about him than anybody else. And I never knew a man freer from any weakness for women. He was always so awfully sorry for them, don't you know. Sarah Cayley could never have fastened herself on him if he hadn't been sorry for her. No more could that girl—Maggie Forrest."

"How did he come to know her?"

"Oh, some fellow he knew had behaved pretty badly to her, and Walter had been paying for her keep, years before there was anything between them. She got dependent on him, and he on her. We are pathetically dependent creatures, Mrs. Majendie."

"What was she like?"

"She. Oh, a soft, simple, clinging little thing. And instead of shaking her off, he let her cling. That's how it all began. Then, of course, the rest followed. I'm not excusing him, mind you. Only—" Poor Hannay became shy and unhappy. He hid his face in his hands and lifted it from them, red, as if with shame. "The fact is," he said, "I'm a clumsy fellow, Mrs. Majendie. I want to help you, but I'm afraid of hurting you."

"Nothing can hurt me now."