

"I suppose," she added, when it blew over, "I suppose there's no use staying any longer. We can't do any good now."

It was unanimously agreed that as they certainly could do no good now they might as well go. Nevertheless they tarried, simmering with expectation and curiosity. Not every day did chance provide an event so dramatic in its elements, a situation so piquant, and so promising. Suddenly as an earthquake the thing came, and behold a ghastly rent in the moral and, what was far worse, in the social reputation of the Herricks. A disaster fascinates in proportion to its terror and the havoc it works. It was impossible that Herrick and his wife could survive the disaster of that afternoon.

"I wonder if Mr. Herrick means to come back to us," said Lady Stapleton, tactfully furnishing an excuse for delay. "Perhaps we'd better wait a minute."

Of course they had better wait. It would be positively indecent to rush off as if they didn't care and didn't feel for people in misfortune. So they waited in a pleasant tingle till the maid entered to serve tea. At that Lady Stapleton made a gesture not remotely suggesting the agonies of sea-sickness. "No tea for me, thank you," she told the maid.

"Nor for me," "Nor for me," "Nor for me," came like a running fire of musketry from the others.

"Very good, m'lady," returned the maid, reddening in confusion. "And Mr. Herrick's 'pologies, and he hopes as you'll excuse him." She made a curtsy, as though apologising in turn for her master's message.

"Certainly, certainly," returned Lady Stapleton, at once beginning to gather herself up. "Pray tell Mr. Herrick that he's not to think of excuses or apologies. Take care to tell him that, if you please."