

asked because it was so clear the invitation would never be accepted, or because she was wanted to cover the position? One or the other, or something like it—no good or honourable motive!... Oh no!—nothing dishonourable, of course, in that sense—so Marianne reasoned with herself—but there were distinctions of honour and dishonour in higher strata of morality, above the gutter-ethics Charlotte would always be harping on. And yet!—suppose there had been any truth in that Steptoe legend, with the worst interpretations on it, might not Titus have concealed another self all along? He had concealed something: that she knew. Why not many things? Why not everything?

The condemned letter was not altogether judicious, but its very errors of judgment might have led to plain speech, recrimination, a storm, and a reconciliation. Anything would have been better, as the result showed, than an ill-constructed epistle Marianne wrote in the end, a message for her husband to pass on to Miss Arkroyd much on the lines Charlotte had suggested. Too many words for a message, too few for a letter from any wife to a husband under circumstances where brevity might be ascribed to pique. In which too she could not bring herself to the point of saying she hoped to see Miss Arkroyd, either in town or elsewhere, because she didn't. She hated Judith, but would not confess the reason to herself. So the letter worked out as nothing but a cold and civil message, refusing a very cordially written invitation. And it was all the worse that it contained a few lines in answer to Titus's last—not an unaffectionate epistle, written promptly on the evening of his arrival. But Marianne was a truthful person when her back was up, and wasn't going to tell any lies when candour tasted sweet in her mouth. So she indulged in a word or two of postscript on the back of the letter, and didn't quite like it when re-read. But really the text was just as bad without it. Look at the chilly "My dear Alfred," and "yr: aff: wife"! She fought off her vacillation, helped by a glance at Judith's letter and an allusion to her "dear husband"; closed the envelope, directed and stamped it, feeling determined, while she knew under the skin that she was wrong, and was showing a proper spirit.