

XXV

WHEN Charity re-entered the house the sense of its emptiness came on her as a shock. The abruptness of Hagar's departure was like an unexpected vanishing. Charity found it impossible to realize that she had gone. On the breakfast-table there was the milk she had only tasted and the bread she had broken but not eaten. A few minutes ago she had been there, and now she had gone forever. A few minutes ago the baby had been cooing and crowing and stretching out dimpled hands; now he, too, had gone, and Charity should never see him any more. William had gone; Hagar had gone; the child had gone.

"Everything's gone," she said, aloud, as she stood and looked about her empty home.

She crossed to Hagar's room and opened the door. There was the bed she had slept in; there was the water the baby had been washed in; there was the pretty disorder that belongs to the dressing and undressing of a child. And yet they were both gone. When the morning's household work should be done there would be no other trace of their passage than that in Charity's heart.