

"There can be no question of what is your duty, Edge," Mr. Neeld put in.

"I think none. My brother during his illness discussed the matter with the Comtesse. The money was payable in Petersburg. He could not hope to be well enough to go there. At her suggestion he signed a paper authorising payment to be made to her or to an agent appointed by her. The money being destined for her ultimately, this naturally seemed the best arrangement. She could go and receive the money, or send for it—as a fact she went in person when the time came—and all would be settled."

"Quite so. And the transaction would not appear on the face of Sir Randolph's accounts or bank-book," Harry suggested.

"It's possible that weight was given to that consideration too, but it is not very material. The Comtesse, then, was in possession of this authority. My brother's illness took a turn for the worse. To be brief, he died before the day came on which the money was to be paid."

"And she presented the authority all the same?" asked Harry. "And got the money, did she?"

"That is precisely the course she adopted," assented Colonel Edge.

Harry took a walk up and down the room and returned to the hearthrug.

"I'm very sensible of your kindness in coming here to-day," he said, "and your conduct is that of a man of honour. But at this point I'll stop you, please. I'm aware that *primâ facie* the law would pronounce me to be Sir Randolph's son. That has always been disclaimed on our side, and could easily be disproved on yours. I have nothing to do with Sir Randolph Edge or his property."

The Colonel listened unmoved.

"In any case you would have nothing to do with my brother's property," he remarked. "He left a will by which I was constituted sole legatee."

"Then if she robbed anybody she robbed you?"