

in moving she found herself oddly weak and nerveless—conscious, not of resentment, but of a gently regretful pity towards that brilliant, if rather shifty, young gentleman, her spouse.

She hadn't been the right wife for him from the first, that was the long and short of the matter. Some passionate and fecund creature, even if she were jealous and made him scenes, would have satisfied him, made him happier and, by that much, brought out the best in his character, far more than she, Frances, ever had or could have done. If he'd disappointed her, she must have also disappointed him countless times. On the whole, their radical divergence of disposition and interests granted, he had treated her with laudable forbearance, so that, should he by now have set his affections elsewhere, she bore him no grudge, truly had no quarrel with him—none.

'Only—only——'

Which unfinished mental exclamation coincided with Frances's arrival at the top of the staircase. There she waited, leaning against the balustrade to recover her breath and ease a certain oppression in the region of her heart.