

"You don't care for money, then? Is there nothing you care more for than life—nothing in the world?"

"Nothing that I can think of just now, except things that life is needful for; such as to help you, if ever you want me. . . . Shall not that be a bargain? Mári, won't you take my hand on that?"

But she did not seem to hear me, and had left me for that day with more food for thought of her than ever. That she had a history was clear; was I being drawn into it, even to the loss of my will?

To-morrow duly came, and as duly brought Mári. Without her visit it would not have seemed like a day at all. But there was no approach to a return of that vague talk of yesterday. Its impression was upon me, and therefore may have been, in like manner, upon her also; and it was, perhaps, for this very reason that it was tacitly avoided. She was even gay, as if she had heard good news. But every now and then her gaiety, when at its brightest, would be suddenly clouded by a sigh, or by a look in her eyes so wistful that it almost brought tears into my own. And then, just when my heart was the most keenly aching to give her life some of the help I was sure it needed, the sigh would cease, and the look would pass, and she would seem like a woman without a care, or else like a woman with so many that she had grown reckless of them all. . . . And as to who or what she was, I had by this time altogether ceased to care a straw. . . . Had I, in truth, been giving her my life for her fee? And, if so, how was it going to end? Nay, rather, how was it going to begin?