

to entrust a third person with the task of giving her this news? One of her own sex perhaps?" He seemed to contemplate a possible fainting-fit, and, remembering his novels, the necessity of cutting stay-laces, a task better left to women.

"You're thinking of Mina; of Mina Zabriská?" asked Harry, laughing. There again, what a loss! Why had not Mina heard it at first hand? She would have known how to treat the thing.

"She's always taken a great interest in the matter, and—and I understand is very friendly with—with Miss Gainsborough," said Neeld.

"We shall have to make up our minds what to call ourselves soon," sighed Harry.

"There can be no doubt at all," Edge put in; "and if I may venture to suggest, I should say the sooner the necessity is faced the better."

"Certainly, certainly," Harry assented absently. Even the girl in the restaurant must know about it soon; there must be another pow-wow in all the papers soon. But what would Cecily say? "If ever the time comes——." He had laughed at that; it had sounded so unlikely, so unreal, so theatrical, "If ever the time comes, I shall remember." That was a strange thing to look back to now. But it was all strange—the affair of the beastly new viscounty, Blinkhampton and its buildings, the Arbitration and the confidence of Mr. Disney. Madame Valfier—Comtesse d'Albreville—with a little help from Addie Tristram had brought all these things about. The result of Harry's review of them was English enough to satisfy Wilmot Edge himself.

"The whole thing makes me look rather an ass, I think," said he.

"No doubt you acted impulsively," Edge allowed. It was fully equivalent to an assent.

"Good Heavens, I'd been brought up to it! It had always been the fact of my life." He made no pretences about the matter now. "It never occurred to me to think of any mistake. That certificate"—it lay on the table still—"was the sword