

he could not, at least, dissemble himself against himself.

He got up, lit the gas, and sat on the edge of the bed, regarding his reflection in the mirror with a gravity and touch of irritation that was comical.

"What is the use of a man praying for the welfare of his soul, when he knows in that soul he is playing a double part, and will play it again to-morrow?" he muttered aloud. "But after all, there has been no great wrong done. I have kissed her, and told her I love her as much as ever; which is not true, perhaps. Bella is a weak woman, and I suppose I should be stronger. No, I don't suppose Carrie would like it. And Carrie mustn't know. Bella loves me—that is where the trouble lies. And yet why should I put the blame on Bella? I am a miserable coward; that is the plain truth of it. Why can't I make up my mind *now* to write Carrie, asking her to come home, telling her I am lonely? It would be an honorable lie, at any rate, out of dishonor. After all, I can't love Carrie as much as I thought I did. And yet, if death were to come in at that door now, and say: I must take one; which shall it be? I would say—Bella. Do I really love Bella still? Or is it only because the thing is new, and has a flavor of wrong in it, and because it is sweet? Heaven knows it is sweet! And yet the thought of Bella's going away makes me feel wretched. At all events, I can pray for Carrie and Ethel, and the boy, thank God; and feel myself the miserable weak fool that I am!"

Matters unfortunately *progressed*, as Harry cynically termed it to himself. People, it is scarcely worth mentioning, had long since remarked the affair. Some scowled, and, doubtless, Mrs. Bargo, or one of her confreres, would have written Mrs. Proteus an anonymous letter, because you can say so much more untruth in an anonymous letter than you can over your

own signature, but that, as I have said, the gossips were out of the town for the main part; and those who were not did not know Mrs. P.'s address, which in this instance was to be regretted. Not a few—of the men—said what a lucky dog Proteus was; but they never would have believed it!

The affair had become one of daily inseparableness now. One evening during the oft-repeated drive, the talk turned on that inevitable climax, Bella's going away. It would have been more proper to have said Mrs. Proteus' coming home. Old topics, interrupted by the hand of circumstance, had been resumed. The ashes of the old love had been stirred up quite vigorously, and the bright coals discovered there had served to kindle a fire that was not to be easily quenched.

Only the day before he had received a letter from his wife, imploring him to come down and dissipate their loneliness, and as Ethel was not well; and in reply he had written some excuse. Something had to be done, he had said to himself fiercely, fighting down the better impulse that struggled weakly within him.

"She writes that she will be back shortly," he said, presently. He threw his cigar away as he spoke, glanced at his companion, and then looked dreamily out at the harvest landscape.

"Yes," said Bella, faintly.

"The train will not go east for two hours," continued Proteus, in meditative voice, still looking away at the darkening woods and the ruddy sky beyond. "We would be in New York or wherever we liked to-morrow. Bella, will you go?"

"Harry —"

"Will you go, Bella? Look up, darling! You do love me, I know. There—kiss me, and say you will! Bella, it was all a mistake between us before—the last five years of our life have been a mistake. But now I shall have you, and we shall have each other forever!"