

Lucia could not help laughing, though she did so a little nervously.

"Don't be unreasonable," she said.

"But I am. I must needs put it to the touch again. Lucia, you know what I want to say; can't you forget the past, and come home to Hunsdon and be my wife?"

They stood still side by side, in the starry darkness and neither of them knew very well for a few minutes what they said. Only Maurice understood that the object of his life was gained; and Lucia felt that from henceforth, for ever, she would never be perverse, or passionate, or wilful again, for Maurice had forgiven her, and loved her still.

They never noticed that the boat was delayed beyond its time, and that other passengers chafed at the delay. They stayed on deck in the starlight, and said little to each other, but they both felt that a new life had begun—a life which seemed to be grafted on the old one before their troubles, and to have nothing to do with this last year. When Maurice was about to say good-night at the cabin door, he made the first allusion to what had brought them together.