

"It's a fact, upon my soul. I tell you, <sup>1</sup>a sensible girl would shudder at the thought of entrusting her future to a man improvident enough to propose to her; a fellow capable of marrying a woman is the sport of a reckless and undisciplined nature that she should beware of."

"The end is curaçoa-and-brandy," said Kent, "and in your best vein. What else? You'll contradict yourself with brilliance in a moment if you go on."

The journalist dissembled a grin, and Kent, gazing down the sunny little street, inhaled his cigarette pleasurably. To suppose that Miss Walford would ever be his wife looked to him so chimerical that his companion's warnings did not disturb him, yet he was sufficiently attracted by her to find it exciting that a third person could think it likely. He was the son of a man who had once been very wealthy, and who, having attempted to repair injudicious investments by rasher speculation, had died owning little more than enough to defray the cost of his funeral. At the age of nineteen Humphrey had realised that, with no stock-in-trade beyond an education and a bundle of rejected manuscripts, it was incumbent on him to fight the world unassisted, and, suppressing his literary ambitions as likely to tell against him, he had betaken himself to some connections who thrived in commerce and had been socially agreeable. To be annihilated