

on him. She only knew that the silence seemed age-long, the pause cruel, and that her heart was beating so loudly that it seemed to her that he must hear it. At last, "Do you mean," he asked, his voice muffled and uncertain, "that it is all over between you?"

"It is quite over between us," she answered soberly. "It was a mistake from the beginning. Fortunately we found it out in time."

"When—when did he——"

"Oh, before this arose. Some time before this arose." She spoke lightly, but her cheeks were hot.

"He did not tell me."

"No?"

"No," Basset repeated. He spoke angrily, as if he felt this a grievance, but in no other way could he have masked his emotion. Perhaps he did not mask it altogether, for she was observing him—ah, how keenly was she observing him! "On the contrary, he led me to believe," he continued, "that things were as before between you, and that he would tell you this himself. It was for that reason that I let a week go by before I wrote to you."

"Just so," she said, squeezing her handkerchief into a ball, and telling herself that the worst was over now, the story told, that in another minute this would be done and past, and her hot cheeks would be cool. "Just so, I quite understand. At any rate, there is no longer any question of that, Mr. Basset. And now," briskly, "may I see this famous deed which is to do so much. You brought it with you, I hope?"

"Yes, I brought it," he answered heavily. He took a packet of papers from his breast-pocket, and it did not escape her—she was cooler now—that his fingers were not as steady as a man's fingers should be. The packet he produced was tied about with old and faded green ribbon, and bore a docket on the outside. She looked at it with curiosity. That ribbon had been tied by a long-dead hand in the reign of Queen Anne! Those yellowish papers had lain in damp and darkness a hundred and forty years, that in the end