

'Satisfied!' said Hester, indignantly.

'I mean with what she is doing—with her way of living.'

There was silence. But presently there was a stifled sob in the darkness; and Hester knew that Nelly was thinking of those irrecoverable weeks of which Bridget's cruelty had robbed her.

Then presently bedtime came, and Hester saw her guest to her room. But a little while after, as she was standing by her own window she heard the garden door open and perceived a small figure slipping down over the lawn—a shadow among shadows—towards the path along the lake. And she guessed of course that Nelly had gone out to take a last look at the scene of her lost happiness, before her departure on the morrow.

Only twenty-two—with all her life before her—if she lived!

Of course, the probability was that she would live—and gradually forget—and in process of time marry William Farrell. But Hester could not be at all sure that the story would so work out. Supposing that the passion of philanthropy, or the passion of religion, fastened upon her—on the girlish nature that had proved itself with time to be of so much finer and rarer temper than those about her had ever suspected? Both passions are absorbing; both tend to blunt in many women the natural instinct of the woman towards the man. Nelly had been an old-fashioned, simple girl, brought up in a