

CHAPTER II

ON the same day, about half-past four, a taxicab stopped before the door of a house in Westminster, and the short, broad figure of Martin Dale got out quickly.

"One moment," he said to the chauffeur.

And he pressed the bell.

A woman servant came in a moment, and he asked her:

"Is Mrs. Sartoris at home?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's good!"

Dale turned round and paid the chauffeur, and gave him a shilling for himself.

"Hot, isn't it?" he said to the maid, as he stepped into the hall and laid down his soft hat and his stick.

"Very hot, sir," she agreed, but noticing with some surprise the beads of perspiration on his broad forehead.

"We ought all to be out of London."

"Mrs. Sartoris only came back to-day, sir, and is leaving again for Sharnley Green on Saturday."

"Then I'm lucky. I was awfully afraid I shouldn't find her."

The maid led the way upstairs to a long low-ceilinged Adams drawing-room and went to find her mistress. A moment later a rather large woman of perhaps forty-five, with a handsome, authoritative head, steady turquoise blue eyes, a clear white complexion and grey hair, came in, looking kind, but unsmiling.

"Have some tea?" she said, in a grave, clear voice, holding out a capable, not small hand, a hand that looked generous.

"No thanks. I've just been trying to make things go by drinking whiskies and sodas."

"Make things go?"

She sat down on a large chintz-covered sofa, and he sat down by her.

"Yes. I thought I was happy when the management at the Central accepted my play for the autumn season."

"Well, it was splendid, wasn't it?"

"Splendid! You've never been in the claws of the managers."