

"Your guests," he faltered.

"Gone!" she told him a little melodramatically. "Didn't you know that we had been alone ever since the morning afterwards? First of all, my almost fiancé, Charlie Grantham, drove off at dawn. He left behind him a little note. He had every confidence in me, but — he went. Then my aunt. She was the most peevish person I ever knew. She seemed to imagine that I had in some way interfered with her plans for your subjugation, and although she knew quite well that no woman of the Mandeleys family could ever stoop to any unworthy or undignified action, she decided to hurry her departure. She left at midday."

"But Miss Sylvia?"

"Sylvia was most ingenuous," Letitia continued, her voice regaining a little of its natural quality. "Sylvia came to me quite timidly and asked me to walk with her in the garden. She wondered — was it really settled between me and Lord Charles? If it was, she was quite willing to go into a nunnery or something equivalent, — Chiswick, I believe it was, with a maiden aunt. But if not, she believed — he had whispered a few things to her — he was hoping to see her that week in town. I was most extraordinary — she couldn't understand it — but it seemed that their old flirtations — you knew, of course, that they had met often before — had left a void in his heart which only she could fill. He had discovered his mistake in time. She threw herself upon my mercy. She left by the three-thirty."

"My God!" he groaned. "And this was all my doing!"

"All your doing," she assented equably. "They were all of them perfectly content to accept your story. There is not one of them who disputes it for a single moment. But you were there, with the secret door