

Mrs. Maughm went on :

"Things have been rather bad here, for some time. If my husband has seemed nervous, it's because he hasn't been happy at home. New York is perfectly awful for married people, especially if you are not poor."

She stopped a moment, while Mary digested the idea that things could be worse if one were rich.

"We haven't made common cause," continued Mrs. Maughm. "I have been restless, carried away by outside interests, and" — she leaned forward and put her hand on the secretary's knee, looking her full in the eyes — "I've nearly lost my husband."

Mary did not shrink. Her eyes were as beautiful as Mrs. Maughm's. But she had grown quite pale, in the interval, and here and there on her flawless skin was a little brown freckle; these golden points stood out, making her complexion more transparent than ever.

The other woman went on: "I don't want to lose him; I don't intend to lose him, if I can help it. I don't need to tell you, do I, after this, that I love him very much indeed?"

Mrs. Maughm's hands closed upon those of the stenographer; and for a moment the two women sat thus in perfect silence; then the wife released her grasp and sank back in her chair. Mary vaguely wondered: "What does she know — what does she think? Does she suspect anything? Is she trying to find out?"

Mrs. Maughm had apparently regained her self-possession. "I wanted to ask you several questions quite frankly," she was saying. "Somehow, I don't feel like asking them now. It doesn't make so much difference where my husband has gone. I believe he will come back; and if you knew, you would feel yourself in honour bound — I know how discreet you are — not to tell me. As I said before, I am not trying to spy on my husband through