

to be," he hastened to explain. "In fact, I have been doubting even if I were right, after all."

Bessie's startled look brought out of him like a confession the story of the last hours before her coming to the full meaning of the state in which she found him; how the burden of it all had overtopped him; how she had come to find him not brave and certain, but doubting.

"But now," she affirmed buoyantly, "you are strong, you are certain again."

The very radiance, the fresh youthful happiness on the face of Bessie, checked the assent to this which was on his lips. He suddenly thought of what this action would mean to her, this beautiful, loving, aspiring young woman. She was his wife now in spirit. By some miracle of God their lives had in a moment been fused unalterably. He might bear a stigma for himself, but had he a right to assume a stigma for her?

"Why, John," she murmured, wonder mingling with mild reproach, as she saw him hesitate.

"Listen, my girl," began her lover, with infinite sympathy and tenderness in his manner, and gravely he re-sketches the elements in the situation as they would apply to her.

Bessie did listen, and as gravely as John spoke to her,—listened until her eyes were first perplexed and then down-cast. Sitting thus, seeing nothing, she saw everything; all that it might mean to her to become the partner of this public shame. She thought of her college friends, of her mother with her social aspirations, of her strong and high-standing father and the circle of his business and personal associates; of the part she hoped herself to play in the new political life that was coming to her sex. She saw it and for a moment was afraid, cowering before it as her lover had cowered. John, in an agony of suspense, watched this conflict staging itself graphically