

XV

This then—this long trouble of body and of spirit—was what he remembered, sitting in the armchair beyond his bedroom fire, watching the glow, and Sylvia sleeping there exhausted, while the dark plane-tree leaves tapped at the window in the autumn wind; watching, with the uncanny certainty that he would not pass the limits of this night without having made at last a decision that would not alter. For even conflict wears itself out; even indecision has this measure set to its miserable powers of torture, that any issue in the end is better than the hell of indecision itself. Once or twice in those last days even death had seemed to him quite tolerable; but now that his head was clear and he had come to grips, death passed out of his mind like the shadow that it was. Nothing so simple, extravagant, and vain could serve him. Other issues had reality; death—none. To leave Sylvia, and take this young love away; there was reality in that, but it had always faded as soon as it shaped itself; and now once more it faded. To put such a public and terrible affront on a tender wife whom he loved, do her to death, as it were, before the world's eyes—and then, ever remorseful, grow old while the girl was still young? He could not. If Sylvia had not loved him, yes; or, even if he had not loved her; or if, again, though loving him she had stood upon her rights—in any of those events he might have done it. But to leave her whom he did love, and who had said to him so generously: "I will