

CHAPTER XXIII

THOSE who have lived under extreme tension, knowing that some great predominating misery fills their lives—losing it, if ever, only in sleep; waking to it always in the raw cold daylight—these know, too, how the actual we have to face thrusts its petty claims upon us, and will be heard, even though we stop our ears against it. So, for the moment, when the man Lucinda loved and hated had his foot on the stirrup for the first time since his trial of strength with Death, her thought was, "Will he bear it? Is he safe?" For he was still Oliver, with it all! Love outbid Hate, for that moment; and then, when she saw him safe, or seeming so, gave place again to the ever-present imaginings that shadowed her heart and made her life funereal. Was not this the Old Hall, her home; with, as Oliver had said, a memory of her father in every room, an echo of his voice in every sound? And who, she asked herself again and again, was the more guilty of his death—she or Oliver? She had called her lover *murderer*; had *she* the right to brand that name upon him? At least, she should share it with him—share the burden of a penitence she hoped might be his one day; praying daily, as she did, that a time would come when his evil deed would lie less light upon his soul.

For, in truth, one thing that made her lot hardest to bear was Oliver's equanimity; it was but too plain that the panoply of a worldly morality shielded him; kept conscience at bay, sheltered his heart unstung, and let it harden in security. Yet may it not have been that his guilt was really less than hers; for, after all—what course