

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE DEED OF RENUNCIATION

BASSET moved in his chair. He looked at the fire, he looked askance at Mary. He was unhappy and ill at ease. "But do you mean," he said, "that you knew nothing about this until you had my letter?"

"Nothing," Mary answered. "Not a word." She, too, found it more easy to look at the fire.

"You must have been very much surprised?" he said.

"I was. It was for that reason that I asked you to bring me the papers—to bring me everything, so that I might see for myself how it was."

"I don't understand why Audley did not tell you? He said he would."

It was the question that Mary had foreseen and dreaded. She had slept two nights upon the letter and given a long day's thought to it, and she had made up her mind what she would do and how she would do it. But between the planning and the doing there were passages which she would fain have shunned, fain have omitted, had it been possible; and this was one of them. She saw that there was nothing else for it, however—the thing must be told, and told by her. She tried, and not without success, to command her voice. "He did not tell me," she said. "Indeed, I have not seen him. And I ought to inform you, Mr. Basset, you ought to know in these circumstances—that the engagement between my cousin and myself is at an end."

He may have started—he might well be astonished, in view of the business which had brought him there. But he did not speak, and Mary could not tell what effect the news had