

"I can have no woman play the leading part but you. It was written for you, and I have kept you in my mind as I wrote. I..." And then Alfred Challis stopped dead. But his speech, had he let it all out of his heart, would have been: "I have kept you in my mind, and now you will not leave it. You have crept into its secret corners, and rise up between me and my duty at every turn. It is not for nothing that those eyes of yours have flashed through every syllable of my very commonplace blank verse, that that voice of yours has filled out my imagination of a dozen soliloquies complying with the highest canons of dramatic art, that that hand of yours has caressed undeserving tyrants and stabbed innocent persons on insufficient provocation!" It would have been all this, for he would not have been himself if he had kept back his constant sense of the ridiculous, a term in which his mind included himself as a prime factor. But he said never a word further than what we have reported. Only the last particle, "I," as good as contained all the rest.

Judith understood it all now—all that was needed—and began to find her breath and the pulsation of her heart—things one usually forgets—forcing themselves on her attention. Why need the former catch and trip, and clip or magnify her words? Could not the last keep still? Plague take human nature! To think that she, Judith Arkroyd, mistress of herself in her own conceit, should be thus upset; unable to steer her ship out of the currents of a semi-flirtation—granted, that much, Sibyl!—with a middle-aged scribbler, who meant to be bald, in a year or so!

Had Challis dared to look at her at that moment, he would have seen that she had lost colour, as she stopped beside a hawthorn with some pretence of gathering the pink may-bloom. No one gathers may without a knife, and what Judith really did was to get a passing stay, against a slight dizziness, from a hand rested on a bough in easy reach. The gathering pretence sanctioned Challis's half-dozen paces in advance. But he did not look back at her—and it was well for him, perhaps, so beautiful was she against the may-tree—nor she at him. She knew, and he knew she knew.

Both were so conscious of their mutual consciousness