

*liaison*-monger with which Charlotte had not scrupled to clothe her. The intrinsic impossibility of associating such an image with her sister made her feel as though she really disposed of the whole question when she said, with perfect *naïveté*, "But this was Kate!"

How perfectly clear and exhaustive! That was Kate—or would have been had there been any truth in the tale—and Kate was her grown-up sister in the early days when her father was living, and they were a household. That was our Kate that was just thinking about being a young lady when she herself, Marianne, was just beginning to take intelligent notes of her surroundings—our Kate that knew how to play the piano and had a governess—our Kate that became one herself in a modest way when father died, and it turned out that Uncle Barker had invested her mother's settlement-money in himself, contrary to the behests of the Lord Chancellor. How in Heaven's name could a thing one knew as a girl, unlengthened, become an immoral, unprincipled woman, like in books and newspaper-paragraphs? Absurd!

And yet—may not this be a question as hard for us to answer as poor, slow, middle-class, muddle-headed Marianne? Look at it from the other side! How many reprobates, dashing and otherwise, may there not be who began good and sweet, and kept so till they became bad and putrid—can even look back, from the gutter their last stage of decay is on the watch to defile, on a spell of blameless maturity? That ill-complexioned thing that thought it was singing as it reeled from the pothouse door but now, was once—maybe—a savoury little maid enough, with a sweetheart. What if he saw her at this moment?—saw the passers-by shrink from her and leave her a clear pavement?—heard the mock approval of London humour, seasoned to the shameful sight, and unashamed, "Go it, old Sairah"?

The story disclaims imputing all these thoughts to Marianne, or any of them. But the sum and gist of them came out—just as clearly, maybe more so—in those four words, "But this was Kate."

She turned from the window and looked her friend full in the face, in return for "What if it was?"—which was the