

"Please, sir, there's a lady," said the servant, opening the door.

He was startled. His first thought naturally was, "It's Hilda!" in spite of the extreme improbability of it being Hilda. Hilda had never set foot in his house. Nevertheless, supposing it was Hilda, Maggie would assuredly come into the drawing-room—she could not do otherwise—and the three-cornered interview would, he felt, be very trying. He knew that Maggie, for some reason inexplicable by argument, was out of sympathy with Hilda, as with Hilda's son. She had given him regular news of George, who was now at about the same stage of convalescence as himself, but she scarcely mentioned the mother, and he had not dared to inquire. These thoughts flashed through his brain in an instant.

"Who is it?" he asked gruffly.

"I—I don't know, sir. Shall I ask?" replied the servant, blushing as she perceived that once again she had sinned. She had never before been in a house where aristocratic ceremony was carried to such excess as at Edwin's. Her unconquerable instinct, upon opening the front door to a well-dressed stranger, was to rush off and publish the news that somebody mysterious and grand had come, leaving the noble visitor on the door-mat. She had been instructed in the ritual proper to these crises, but with little good result, for the crises took her unawares.

"Yes. Go and ask the name, and then tell my sister," said Edwin shortly.

"Miss Clayhanger is gone out, sir."

"Well, run along," he told her impatiently.

He was standing anxiously near the door when she returned to the room.

"Please, sir, it's a Mrs. Cannon, and it's you she wants."

"Show her in," he said, and to himself: "My God!"

In the ten seconds that elapsed before Hilda appeared he glanced at himself in the mantel mirror, fidgeted with his necktie, and walked to the window and back again to his chair. She had actually called to see him! . . . His agitation was extreme. . . . But how like her it was to call thus boldly! . . . Maggie's absence was providential.

Hilda entered, to give him a lesson in blandness. She wore