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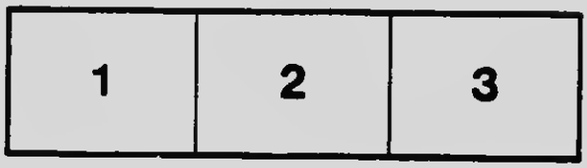

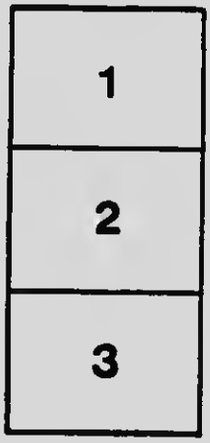

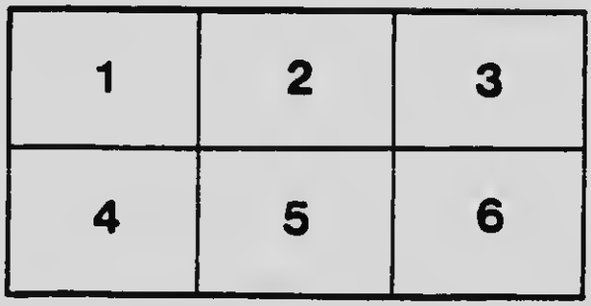

THE LETTER OF THE CONTRACT

BASIL KING

JAMES MONTGOMERY FLAGG

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"Can't you see that my heart's breaking, too?" She looked him in the face, shaking her head, sadly. "No, I can't see that."

'Can't you see that my heart's breaking, too?' She looked him in the face, shaking her head, sadly. 'No, I can't see that.'

THE LETTER OF THE CONTRACT

BY

BASIL KING

AUTHOR OF

The Inner Shrine

ILLUSTRATED

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AUTHOR OF "THE INNER SHRINE"

[BASIL KING]

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I

TRANSGRESSION

IT was strange to think that if, on finishing her coffee in her room, she had looked in on the children, as she generally did, instead of going down to the drawing-room to write a note, her whole life might have been different. "Why didn't I?" was the question she often asked herself in the succeeding years, only to follow it with the reflection: "But perhaps it would have happened in any case. Since the fact was there, I must have come to know it—in the long run."

The note was an unimportant one. She could have sent it by a servant at any minute of the day. The very needlessness of writing it

at once, so that her husband could post it as he went to his office, gave to the act something of the force of fate.

Everything that morning, when she came to think of it, had something of the force of fate. Why, on entering the drawing-room, hadn't she gone straight to her desk, according to her intention, if it wasn't that fate intervened? As a matter of fact, she went to the oriel window looking down into Fifth Avenue, with vague thoughts of the weather. It was one of those small Scotch corner windows that show you both sides of the street at once. It was so much the favorite conning-spot of the family that she advanced to it from habit.

And yet, if she had gone to her desk, that girl might have disappeared before the lines of the note were penned. As it was, the girl was there, standing as she had stood on other occasions—three or four, at least—between the two little iron posts that spaced off the opening for foot-passengers into the Park. She was looking up at the house in the way Edith had noticed before—not with the scrutiny of one who wishes to see, but with the forlorn patience of the unobtrusive creature hoping to be seen.

TRANSGRESSION

In a neat gray suit of the fashion of 1904 and squirrel furs she was the more unobtrusive because of a background of light snow. She was pathetically unobtrusive. Not that she seemed poor; she suggested, rather, some one lost or dazed or partially blotted out. People glanced at her as they hurried by. There were some who turned and glanced a second time. She might have been a person with a sorrow—a love-sorrow. At that thought Edith's heart went out to her in sympathy. She herself was so happy, with a happiness that had grown more intense each month, each week, each day, of her six years of married life, that it filled her imagination with a blissful, pitying pain to think that other women suffered.

The pity was sincere, and the bliss came from the knowledge of her security. She felt it wonderful to have such a sense of safety as that she experienced in gazing across the street at the girl's wistful face. It was like the overpowering thankfulness with which a man on a rock looks on while others drown. It wasn't callousness; it was only an appreciation of mercies. She was genuinely sorry for the girl, if the girl needed sorrow; but she didn't see what she

could do to help her. It was well known that out in that life of New York—and of the world at large—there were tempests of passion in which lives were wrecked; but from them she herself was as surely protected by her husband's love as, in her warm and well-stored house, she was shielded from hunger and the storm. She accepted this good fortune meekly and as a special blessedness; but she couldn't help rejoicing all the more in the knowledge of her security.

The knowledge of her security gave luxury to the sigh with which she turned in the course of a few minutes to write her note. The desk stood under the mirror between the two windows at the end of the small back drawing-room. The small back drawing-room projected as an ell from the larger one that crossed the front of the house. She had just reached the words, "shall have great pleasure in accepting your kind invitation to—" when she heard her husband's step on the stairs. He was coming up from his solitary breakfast. She could hear, too, the rustle of the newspaper in his hand as he ascended, softly and tunelessly whistling. The sound of that whistling, which generally accom-

panied his presence in the house, was more entrancing to her than the trill of nightingales.

The loneliness her fancy ascribed to the girl over by the Park emphasized her sense of possession. She raised her head and looked into the mirror. The miracle of it struck her afresh, that the great, strong man she saw entering the room, with his brown velvet house-jacket and broad shoulders and splendid head, should be hers. She herself was a little woman, of soft curves and dimpling smiles and no particular beauty; and he had stooped, in his strength and tenderness, to make her bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, as she had become. And he had become bone of *her* bone and flesh of *her* flesh. She was no more his than he was hers. That was the great fact. She was no longer content with the limited formula, "They twain shall be one flesh"; they twain had become one spirit and one life.

It was while asserting this to herself, not for the first time, that she saw him start. He started back from the window—the large central window—to which he had gone, probably with vague thoughts of the weather, like herself. It was the manner of his start that chiefly at-

tracted her attention. After drawing back he peered forward. It was an absurd thing to think of him; she knew that—of him of all people!—but one would almost have said that, in his own house, he shrank from being seen. But there was the fact. There was his attitude—his tiptoeing—his way of leaning toward the mantelpiece at an angle from which he could see what was going on in the Park and yet be protected by the curtain.

Then it came to her, with a flush that made her tingle all over, that she was spying on him. He thought her in the children's room up-stairs, when all the while she was watching him in a mirror. Never in her life had she known such a rush of shame. Bending her head, she scribbled blindly, "dinner on Tuesday evening the twenty-fourth at—" She was compelled by an inner force she didn't understand to glance up at the mirror again, but, to her relief, he had gone.

Later she heard him at the telephone. To avoid all appearance of listening she went to the kitchen to give her orders for the day. On her return he was in the hall, dressed for going out. Scanning his face, she thought he looked suddenly care-worn.

"I've ordered a motor to take me down-town," he explained, as he pulled on his gloves. He generally took the street-car in Madison Avenue.

"Aren't you well?" she thought it permissible to ask.

"Oh yes; I'm all right."

"Then why—?"

He made an effort to be casual: "Well, I just thought I would."

She had decided not to question him—it was a matter of honor or pride with her, she was not sure which—but while giving him the note to post she ventured to say, "You're not worried about anything, are you?"

"Not in the least." He seemed to smother the words by stooping to kiss her good-by.

She followed him to the door. "You'd tell me, wouldn't you, if you were worried?"

For the second time he stooped and kissed her, again smothering the words, "Yes, dear; but I'm not."

She stood staring at the glass door after he had closed it behind him. "Oh, what is it?" she questioned. Within less than an hour the world had become peopled with fears, and all

she could do was to stare at the door through which she could still see him dimly.

She could see him dimly, but plainly, for the curtain of patterned filet-work hanging flat against the glass was almost transparent from within the house, though impenetrable from outside. Was it her imagination that saw him look cautiously round before leaving the protection of the doorway? Was it her imagination that watched while he crossed the pavement hurriedly, to spring into the automobile before he could be observed? Was it only the needless alarm of a foolish woman that thought him anxious to reach the shelter of the motor lest he should be approached or accosted? She tried to think so. It was easier to question her own sanity than to doubt him. She would not doubt him. She assured herself of that as she returned to her post in the oriel window.

The girl in gray was gone, and down the long street, over which there was a thin glaze of ice, the motor was creeping carefully. She watched it because he was inside. It was all she should see of him till nightfall. The whole of the long day must be passed with this strange new something in her heart—this something that wasn't

anything. If he would only come back for a minute and put his arms about her and let her look up into his face she would *know* it wasn't anything. She did know it; she said so again and again. But if he would only discover that he had forgotten somethiug—a handkerchief or his cigar-casc; that did 'appen occasionally . . .

And then it was as if her prayer was to be answered while still on her lips. Before the vehicle had got so far away as to be indistinguishable from other vehicles she saw it stop. It stopped and turned. She held her breath. Slowly, very slowly, it began to creep up the gentle slope again. She supposed it must be the treacherous ground that made it move at such a snail's pacc. It moved as if thc chauffeur or his client were looking for some one. Gradually it drew up at the curb. It was the curb toward the Park—and from another of thc little openings with iron posts to space them off appeared the girl in gray.

She advanced promptly, as if shc had been called. At the door of the car she stood for a few minutes in conversation with the occupant. For one of the parties at least that method of communication was apparently not

satisfactory, for he stepped out, dismissed the cab, and accompanied the girl through the little opening into the Park. In a second or two they were out of sight, down one of the sloping pathways.

During the next two months Edith had no explanation of this mystery, nor did she seek one. After the first days of amazement and questioning she fell back on what she took to be her paramount duty—to trust. She argued that if he had seen her in some analogous situation, however astounding, he would have trusted her to the uttermost; and she must do the same by him. There were ever so many reasons, she said to herself, that would not only account for the incident, but do him credit. The girl might be a stenographer dismissed from his office, asking to be reinstated; she might be a poor relation making an appeal; she might be a wretched woman toward whom he was acting on behalf of a friend. Such cases, and similar cases, arose frequently.

The wonder was, however, that he never spoke of it. There was that side to it, too. It induced another order of reflection. He

was so much in the habit of relating to her, partly for her amusement, partly for his own, all the happenings, both trivial and important, of each day, that his silence with regard to this one, which surely must be considered strange—strange, if no more—was noticeable. A wretched woman toward whom he was acting on behalf of a friend! It surely couldn't, *couldn't* be *a* wretched woman toward whom he was acting, not on behalf of a friend, but . . .

That it might be all over and done with would make no difference. Of course it was all over and done with—if it was that. No man could love a woman as he had loved his wife during the past six or seven years, and still— But it *wasn't* that. It never *had* been that. *If* it had been—even before they were married, even before he knew her— But she would choke that thought back. She would choke everything back that told against him. She developed the will to trust. She developed a trust that acted on her doubts like a narcotic—not solving them, but dulling their poignancy into stupor.

So March went out, and April passed, and

May came in, with leaves on the trees and tulips in the Park, and children playing on the bits of greensward. She had walked as far as the Zoo with the two little boys, and, having left them with their French governess, was on her way home. People were in the habit of dropping in between four and six, and of late she had become somewhat dependent on their company. They kept her from thinking. Their scraps of gossip provided her, when she talked to her husband, with topics that steered her away from dangerous ground. He himself had given her a hint that a certain ground was dangerous; and, though he had done it laughingly, she had grown so sensitive as to see in his words more perhaps than they meant. She had asked him a question on some subject—she had forgotten what—quite remote from the mystery of the girl in gray. Leaning across the table, with amusement on his lips and in his eyes, he had replied:

"Don't you remember the warning?

'Where the apple reddens
Never pry,
Lest we lose our Edens,
Eve and I.'"

Inwardly she had staggered from the words as if he had struck her, though he had no reason to suspect that. In response she merely said, pensively: "*En sommes nous là?*"

"*En sommes nous*—where?"

"Where the apple reddens."

"Oh, but everybody's there."

"You mean all married people."

"Married and single."

"But married people *more* than single."

"I mean that we all have our illusions, and we'd better keep them as long as possible. When we don't—"

"We lose our Edens."

"Exactly."

"So that our Edens are no more than a sort of fool's paradise."

"Ah, no; a sort of wise man's paradise, in which he keeps all he's been able to rescue from a wicked world."

She was afraid to go on. She might learn that she and their children and their home and their happiness had been what *he* had been able to rescue from a wicked world—and that wouldn't have appeased her. Her thoughts would have been of the wicked world from

which he had escaped more than of the paradise in which he had found shelter. She was no holy Elisabeth, to welcome Tannhäuser back from the Venusberg. That he should have been in the Venusberg at all could be only a degree less torturing to her than to know he was there still.

So she kept away from subjects that would have told her more than she feared already, taking refuge in themes she had once considered vapid and inane. To miss nothing, she hurried homeward on that May afternoon, so as to be beside her tea-table in the drawing-room before any one appeared. And yet, the minute came when she cast aside all solicitudes and hesitations.

Going up the pathway leading to the opening opposite her house, she noticed a figure standing between the two iron posts. It was not now a figure in gray, but one in white—in white, with a rose-colored sash, and carrying a rose-colored parasol. Edith quickened her pace unconsciously, urged on by fear lest the girl should move away before she had time to reach her. In spite of a rush of incoherent emotions she was able to reflect that she was

perfectly cool, entirely self-possessed. She was merely dominated by a need—the need of coming face to face with this person and seeing who she was. She had no idea what she herself would do or say, or whether or not she would do or say anything. That was secondary; it would take care of itself. The immediate impulse was too imperative to resist. She must at least *see*, even if nothing came of her doing so. If she had any thought of a resulting consequence it was in the assumption that her presence as wife and woman of the world would dispel the noxious thing she had been striving to combat for the past two months, as the sun dissipates a miasma.

But her approaches were careful and courteous. She, too, carried a parasol, negligently, gracefully, over the shoulder. It served to conceal her face till she had passed the stranger by a pace or two and glanced casually backward. She might have done so, however, with full deliberation, for the woman took no notice of her at all. Her misty, troubled blue eyes, of which the lids were red as if from weeping, were fixed on the house across the way.

Edith saw now that, notwithstanding a cer-

tain youthfulness of dress and bearing, this was a woman, not a girl. She was thirty-five at least, though the face was of the blond, wistful, Scandinavian type that fades from pallor to pallor without being perceptibly stamped by time. It was pallor like that of the white rose after it has passed the perfection of its bloom and before it has begun to wither.

Edith paused, still without drawing the misty eyes on herself.

"Do you know the people in that house?" she asked, at last.

The woman looked at her, not inquiringly or with much show of comprehension, but vaguely and as from a distance. Edith repeated the question.

The thin, rather bloodless lips parted. The answer seemed to come under compulsion from a stronger will: "I—I know—"

"You know the gentleman."

The pale thin lips parted again. After a second or two there was a barely audible "Yes."

"I'm his wife."

There was no sign on the woman's part either of surprise or of quickened interest.

There was only the brief hesitation that preceded all her responses.

"Are you?"

"You knew he was married, didn't you?"

"Oh yes."

"Have you known him long?"

"Eleven years."

"That's longer than I've known him."

"Oh yes."

"Do you know how long I've known him?"

"Oh yes."

"How do you know?"

"I remember."

"What makes you remember?"

"He told me."

"Why did he tell you?"

A glow of animation came into the dazed face. "That's what I don't know. I didn't care—much. He always said he would marry some day. It had nothing to do with me. We agreed on that from the first."

"From the first of—what?"

"From the first of everything."

Before putting the next question Edith took time to think. Because she was so startlingly cool and clear she was aware of feeling like one

who stands with the revolver at her breast or the draught of cyanide in her hand, knowing that within a few seconds it may be too late to reconsider. And yet, she had never in her life felt more perfectly collected. She looked up the street and down the street, and across at her own house, of which the cheerful windows reflected the May sunshine. She bowed and smiled to a man on foot. She bowed and smiled two or three times to people passing in carriages. From the Park she could hear the shrieks of children on a merry-go-round; she could follow a catchy refrain from "The Belle of New York" as played by a hand at a distance. Her sang-froid was extraordinary. It was while making the observation to herself that her question came out, before she had decided whether or not to utter it. She had no remorse for that, however, since she knew she couldn't have kept herself from asking it in the end. As well expect the man staggering to the outer edge of a precipice not to reel over.

"So it was—everything?"

In uttering the words she felt oddly shy. She looked down at the pavement, then, with a flutter of the eyelids, up at the woman.

But the woman herself showed no such hesitation.

"Oh yes."

"And is—still?"

And then the woman who was not a girl, but who was curiously like a child, suddenly took fright. Tears came to her eyes; there was a convulsive movement of the face. Edith could see she was a person who wept easily.

"I won't tell you any more."

The declaration was made in a tone of childish fretfulness.

Edith grew soothing. "I'm sorry if I've hurt your feelings. Don't mind speaking, because it doesn't make any difference to me—now."

The woman stared, the tears wet on her cheeks. "Don't you—love him?"

Edith was ready with her answer. It came firmly: "No."

"Didn't you—*ever?*"

This time Edith considered, answering more slowly. "I don't know. If I ever did—the thing is so dead—that I don't understand how it could ever have been alive."

The woman dried her eyes. "I don't see how you can help it."

"*You* can't help it, can you?" Edith smiled, with a sense of her own superiority. "I suppose that's the reason you come here. I've seen you before."

"Have you?"

"Yes; several times. And that *is* the reason, isn't it?—because you can't help loving him."

The woman's tears began to flow again. "It's because I don't know what else to do. When he doesn't come any more—"

"Oh, so he doesn't come."

"Not unless I make him. When he sees me here—"

"Well, what then?"

"He gets angry. He comes to tell me that if I do it again—"

"I see. But he *comes*. It brings him. That's the main thing, isn't it? Well, now that you've told me so much, I'll—I'll try to —to send him." She was struck with a new thought. "If you were to come in now—you could—you could wait for him."

The frightened look returned. "Oh, but he'd kill me!"

"Oh no, he wouldn't." She smiled again,

with a sense of her superiority. "He wouldn't kill you when he knew I didn't care."

"But *don't* you care?"

She shook her head. "No. And I shall never care again. He can do what he likes. He's free—and so are you. I'd rather he went to you. Eleven years, did you say? Why, he was your husband long before he was mine."

"Oh no; he was never my husband. We agreed from the first—"

"He wasn't your husband according to the strict letter of the contract; but I don't care anything about that. It's what *I* call being your husband. I'd rather you took him back. . . . Oh, my God! There he is."

He was standing on the other side of the street watching them. How long he had been there neither of them knew. Engrossed in the subject between them, and screened by their sunshades, they hadn't noticed him come round the corner from Madison Avenue on his way home. He stood leaning on his stick, stroking an end of his long mustache pensively. He wore a gray suit and a soft gray felt hat. For a minute or more there was no change in his attitude, even when the terrified eyes of the

women told him he was observed. As he began to thread his way among the vehicles to cross the street he displayed neither haste nor confusion. Edith could see that, though he was pale and grave, he could, even in this situation, carry himself with dignity. In its way it was something to be glad of. She herself stood her ground as a man on a sinking ship waits for the waves to engulf him.

Reaching the pavement, he ignored his wife to go directly to the woman.

"What does this mean, Maggie?"

His tone was not so much stern as reproachful. The faded woman, who was still trying to make herself young and pretty, quailed at it.

Edith came to her relief:

"Isn't that something for *you* to explain, Chip?"

He turned to his wife. "I'm willing to explain anything you like, Edith—as far as I can."

"I won't ask you how far that is—because I know already everything I need to know."

"Everything you need to know—what for?"

"For understanding my position, I suppose."

"Your position? Your position is that of my wife."

"Oh no, it isn't. There's your wife."

"Don't say that, Edith. That lady would be the first to tell you—"

"She *has* been the first to tell me. She's been extremely kind. She's answered my questions with a frankness—"

"But *you're* not kind, Edith. Surely you see that—that mentally she's not—not like every one else."

"Oh, quite. I don't think *I* am now. I doubt if I ever shall be again. No woman can be mentally like every one else after she's been deceived as we've been."

"*She* hasn't been deceived, Edith; and I should never have deceived you if—"

She laughed without mirth. "If you hadn't wanted to keep me in the dark."

"No; if I hadn't had responsibilities—"

"Responsibilities! Do you call *that*"—her glance indicated the woman, whose misty stare went from the one to the other in a vain effort to follow what they were saying—"do you call that a responsibility?"

"I'm afraid I do, Edith."

"And what about—me?"

"Hasn't a man more responsibilities than one?"

"A married man hasn't more wives than one."

"A married man has to take his life as his life has formed itself. He was an unmarried man first."

"Which means, I suppose, that the ties he formed when he was an unmarried man—"

"May bind him still—if they're of a certain kind."

"And yours *are*—of a certain kind."

"They're of *that* kind. I haven't been able to free myself from them. But don't you think we'd better go in? We can hardly talk about such things out here."

She bowed to another passing friend. He, too, lifted his hat. When the friend had gone by she glanced hastily toward the house.

"No, I can't go in," she said, hurriedly. "I'd rather talk out here."

"Very well, then. We can take a stroll in the Park?"

"What? We three?"

"Oh, she's gone—if that's the only reason."

Turning, Edith saw the woman with the rose-colored parasol rapidly descending the path by which she had come.

He turned from the girl to his wife. "I'm willing to explain anything you like—as far as I can."


JAMES MONTGOMERY FLAGG

"I'd still rather stay out here," she said. "If I were to go in, I think it would—"

"Yes? What?"

"I think it would kill me."

"Oh, come, Edith. Let's face the thing calmly. Don't let us become hysterical."

"*Am* I hysterical, Chip?"

"In your own way, yes. Where another woman would make a fuss, you're unnaturally frozen; but it comes to the same thing. I know that your heart—"

"Is breaking. Oh, I don't deny that. But I'd rather it broke here than indoors. I don't know why, but I can stand it here, with people going by; whereas in there—"

"Oh, cut it, Edith, for God's sake! Can't you see that my heart's breaking, too?"

She looked him in the face, shaking her head sadly. "No, Chip, I can't see that. If there had been any danger of it you wouldn't have—"

"But I couldn't help it. That's what you don't seem to understand."

"No; I'm afraid I don't."

"Would you *try* to understand—if I were to tell you?"

"I think I know already most of what you'd

have to say. She's a woman whom you knew long before you knew me—and from whom you've never been able—"

"She was the daughter of a Swedish Lutheran pastor—dead now—established in New Jersey. In some way she drifted to the stage. Her name was Margarethe Kastenskjold. When she went on the stage she made it Maggie Clare. She had about as much talent for the theater as a paper doll. When I first knew her she was still getting odd jobs in third and fourth rate companies. Since then she hasn't played at all."

"I understand. There's been no need of it. She's quite well dressed."

"Let me go on, will you, Edith? I was about two or three and twenty then. She may have been a year or two older. She was living at that time with Billy Cummings. And somehow it happened—after Billy died—and she was stranded—"

She made an appealing gesture. "*Please!* I know how those things come about—or I can easily imagine. In your case—I'd—I'd rather not try." She got the words out somehow without breaking down.

"All the same, Edith," he went on, "you'll *have* to try—if you're going to do me anything like justice. If she hadn't been a refined, educated sort of girl, entirely at sea in her surroundings, and stranded—stranded for money, mind you, next door to going to starve—and no chance of getting a job, because she couldn't act a little bit—if it hadn't been for all that—"

"Oh, I know how you'd be generous!"

"Yes; but you don't know how I came to be a fool."

"Is there any reason why I *should* know—now that the fact is there?"

He looked at her steadily. "Edith! What are you made of?"

She returned his look. "I think—of stone. Up till to-day I've been a woman of flesh and blood; but I'm not sure that I am any longer. You can't kill the heart in a woman's body—and still expect her to *feel*."

"But, Edith—Edith darling—there's no reason why I *should* have killed the heart in your body when I never dreamed of doing you a wrong—that is, an intentional wrong," he corrected.

"You knew you were doing *some* woman a

wrong—some future woman, the woman you'd marry — as far back as when you took up what Billy Cummings dropped from his dead hands—"

"Oh, that! That, dear, is nothing but the talk of feminist meetings. Men are men, and women are women. You can't make one law for them both. Besides, it's too big a subject to go into now."

"I'm not trying to. I wasn't thinking of men in general; I was thinking only of you."

"But, good Lord, Edith, you don't think I've been better than any one else, do you?"

Her forlorn smile made his heart ache. "I *did* think so. I dare say it was a mistake."

"It *was* a mistake. If you hadn't made it—"

"But it was at least a mistake one can understand. I could hardly be expected to take it for granted—whatever men may be, or may have the right to be—that the man who asked me to marry him—and who made me love him as I think few men have been loved by women —I could hardly take it for granted that he was already keeping—and had been keeping for years—and would keep for years to come—another—"

He moved impatiently. "But, I tell you, I couldn't get rid of her. I couldn't shake her off—or pay her off—or do any of the usual things. It was agreed between us before I married you—*long* before I married you—that everything was at an end. But, poor soul, she doesn't know what an agreement is. There's something lacking in her. She's always been like a child, and of late years she's been more so. If you knew her as I do you'd be sorry for her."

"Oh, I *am* sorry for her. Her whole mind is ravaged by suffering."

"I know it's my fault; but it isn't wholly or even chiefly my fault. A woman like that has no right to suffer. She lost the privilege of suffering when she became what she is. At any rate, she has no right to haunt like a shadow the man who's befriended her—"

"But, I presume, she's befriended *him*. And —and continues to befriend him—since that's the word."

He avoided her eyes, looking up the street and whistling tunelessly beneath his breath.

"I said—*continues* to befriend him," she repeated.

The tuneless whistling went on. She allowed him time to get the full effect of her meaning. As far as she could see her way, her line of action depended on his response. When he dodged the question she knew what she would have to do.

"Look here, Edith," he said, at last, "the long and short of it is this. She's on my hands —and I can't abandon her. I must see that she's provided for, at the very least. Hang it all, she's—she's attached to me; has been attached to me for more than ten years. I can't ignore that; now, can I? And she's helpless. How can I desert her? I can't do it, any more than I could desert a poor old faithful dog—or a baby. Can I, now?"

"No; I dare say not."

"But I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll undertake never to see her again—of my own free will. I'll give you my word of honor—"

She shook her head. "Oh, I'm not asking for that."

"Then what do you ask for? Just tell me, and whatever it is—"

"It's that, since you can't abandon her, you abandon me."

"*What?*"

She repeated the words more firmly.

"*Never.*"

"Then I'm afraid it will be for me to abandon you." She gave him a little nod. "Good-by."

She had turned and taken a step or two along the pavement before his astonishment allowed him to overtake her.

"Edith, for God's sake, what do you mean? You're not crazy, are you?"

"Quite possibly I am; I can't tell yet. Or perhaps I *can* tell. It's like this," she went on, after an instant's thinking. "A half-hour ago, while I was talking to that—that poor creature—before you came up—I was quite aware of being like a woman with a dose of cyanide of potassium in her hand, and doubting whether or not to take it. Well, I took it. I took it and I—died. That is, the Edith who was your wife—died. What survives of her personality is something else. I don't know what it is yet—it's too soon to say—but it isn't your wife. . . . It's—it's something like that."

"Oh, don't!" he groaned. "Don't talk that way. Come in. You can't stay out here."

She looked over at the house again. He thought she shuddered. "I can't stay out here; but I don't have to go in—there."

"What do you mean? Where are you going?"

"Just now I'm going to Aunt Emily's."

"Very well. I'll send a carriage for you after dinner—if you stay so late."

"No; don't do that."

"Do you mean—?"

"I mean that I may stay there for two or three days—perhaps longer. After that I'll—I'll see."

"You'll see—what?"

"Where to go next."

"Oh, come, Edie, let's talk sense. You know I can't allow that."

She smiled again, with that queer, forlorn smile that seemed to stab him. "I'm afraid the authority is out of your hands—now."

He let that pass.

"Even so, there are the children. Think of them."

"I *am* thinking of them—which is why I must hurry away. They'll be here in a minute; and I—I can't see them yet. I shouldn't be able to bear it."

"And do you think you'll be able to bear our being separated for two or three days, when you *know* I adore you? Why, you'll break down within an hour."

"That's just it. That's why I must hurry. I shall break down within half an hour. You don't suppose I can go on like this? I'm almost breaking down now. I must get to Aunt Emily's before—"

She was interrupted by a cry: "Hello, papa!"

Up the pathway leading from the Zoo a little white-suited man of five came prancing and screaming, followed by another of three doing the same. The French governess marched primly and sedately behind them.

"You see?" Edith said, quickly. "I must go. I can't see them to-night—or speak to them—or kiss them—or hear them say their prayers—or anything. You wouldn't understand; but—but I couldn't bear it. You must tell them I've gone to spend a few nights with Aunt Emily, as I did when she was ill. You must say that to the servants, too. Tell Jenny she needn't send me anything—yet. I have some things there—that I left the last time—"

"Oh, you're not going to stay all night," he groaned. "You'll come back."

"Very well. If I come back—I come back. It will be so much the better or so much the worse, as the case may be. If I come back, it will be because I accept the compromise you make between me and—and your other—"

He broke in hastily. "It's not a compromise—and there's no 'other.' If you could see how far from vital the whole thing is, from a man's point of view—"

"Unfortunately, I'm only a woman, and can see it only from a woman's point of view. So that, if I don't come back, it will be because—because—the Edith who was your wife is dead beyond resurrection."

"But she isn't!"

"Perhaps not. We must see. I shall know better when I've—I've been away from you a little."

"And in the mean time you may be risking your happiness and mine."

She shot him a reproachful glance. "Do *you* say that?"

"Yes, Edith, I do say it. If I've broken the letter of the contract, you may be transgress-

ing its spirit. Don't forget that. Take care. What I did, I did because I couldn't help it. You *can* help it—"

"Oh no, I can't. That's where you haven't understood me. You say I don't see things from your point of view, and perhaps I don't. But neither do you see them from mine. You wonder why I don't go over there"—she nodded toward the house—"where I had my home—where my children have theirs—where you and I . . . But I can't. That's all I can say. I may do it some day; I don't know. But just now—I couldn't drag myself up the steps. It would mean that we were going on as before, when all that—that sort of thing—seems to me so—so utterly over."

"You'll feel differently when you've had time to think."

"Perhaps I shall. And time to think is all I'm asking. You understand that, don't you? that I'm not making anything definite—yet. If I can ever come back to you, I will. But if I can't—"

"Hello, mama! Hello, papa!" The elder boy galloped up. "We've seen the monkeys. And one great big monkey looked like—"

"Allô, maman! Allô, papa! N's avons vu les singes—mais des drôles! Il y en avait un qui—"

The children caught their father round the knees. Stooping, he put his arms about them, urging them toward their mother. They were to plead for him—to be his advocates.

"Tell mama," he whispered to the older boy, "not to go to Aunt Emily's to-night. Tell her we can't do without her—that we want her at home." He turned to the younger. *"Dis à maman que tu vas pleurer si elle te quitte ce soir—qu'il faut qu'elle vienne t'écouter dire ta prière."*

But, when he raised himself, Edith was already walking swiftly up the Avenue. He would have followed her, only that the children seemed to restrain him, clinging to his knees. All he could do was to watch her—watch her while the thronging crowds and the shimmering sun-shot dust of the golden afternoon blotted her from his sight—and the great city-world out of which he had received her took her back.

II

RESENTMENT

IT was a strange sensation to be free. It was still more strange that it was not a sensation. It was a kind of numbness. She could only feel that she didn't feel. In spite of her repeated silent assertions, "I'm free! I'm free!" any consciousness of change eluded her.

It was true that there had been a moment like a descent into hell, from which she thought she must come up another woman. Aunt Emily and the lawyer had whirled her somewhere in a motor. Veiled as heavily as was consistent with articulation, she had told a tale that seemed abominable, though it was no more than a narrative of the facts. It added to her sense of degradation to learn that one of the cheaper dailies had published a snapshot of her taken as she was re-entering the motor to come away. But even the horror of that moment passed, as something too un-

real to be other than a dream, and, except that she and the children were staying with Aunt Emily instead of in their own home, all was as before. All was as before to a disappointing degree—to a degree that maddened her.

It maddened her because it brought no appeasement to that which for more than a year had been her dominating motive—to do something to Chip that would bring home to him a realizing sense of what he had done to her. It was not that she wanted revenge. She was positive as to that. She wanted only to make him understand. Hitherto he hadn't understood. She had seen that in all his letters, right up to the moment when, driven to despair by what seemed to her his moral obtuseness, she had implored him not to write again. It was to help him to understand that which he was either unable or unwilling to understand that she had so resolutely refused to see him—partly that, and partly Aunt Emily. She would have died if it hadn't been for Aunt Emily—died or given in; and the mere thought of giving in frightened her.

It frightened her chiefly because she possessed the capacity to do it. In a way it would

be easier to do it than not—easier to do it, and yet impossible to go on with the new situation thus created after it was done. It would mean being back in the old home and resuming the old life; there would be what people called a reconciliation. Chip would be coming and going and whistling tunelessly all over the house. And the awful thing about it would be that he had it in him to be as happy as if this horrible thing had never taken place—happier, doubtless, because it would be behind him. He would not have understood; she would have ceased trying to make him understand; he would have so little seen the significance of his own acts as to feel free to do the same thing all over again.

So the impulse to go back frightened her with a fear that paralyzed her longing. If he had said but once: "Edith, I know I've sinned against you; I know I've made you suffer; I've broken the contract between us; I'm repentant; forgive me," it might have been different. But he had said nothing of the kind. His letters, beseeching though they were, only aggravated her complaint against him. "What else could I do? . . . The poor thing clung to me.

. . . As far as it affected my devotion to you it might have happened in another phase of creation." That was the amazing part of it, that he should expect her to be content with such an explanation, that he should try to deprive her of a wife's last poor pitiful privilege, a sense of indignity. She was not only to condone what he had done, but as nearly as possible she was to give it her approval.

As to this aspect of the case she might not have been so clear if it hadn't been for Aunt Emily. Aunt Emily was very clear. She was clear and just, without being wholly unsympathetic toward Chip. That is, she pointed out the fact that Chip did no more than most men would do. He was no worse than the average. He might even be a little better. But, according to Aunt Emily, the man didn't live who was worthy of a really good woman's love. It was foolish for a really good woman to put herself at the disadvantage of casting her pearls before—well, Aunt Emily was too much of a lady to say what; it was all the more foolish considering the quantity of feminine tag-rag and bobtail quite good enough to be wives.

Edith couldn't deny that her aunt had kept herself on an enviably high plane of safety. She had her money to herself, and no heart-aches. She was respected, admired, and feared. By a little circle of adorers, mostly composed of spinsters younger, poorer, and less advantageously placed than herself, she was even loved. She was far from lonely; she was far from having missed the best things in life. She was traveled, well-read, philanthropic, and broad-minded. She was likewise tall, stately, and dominant, with an early Victorian face to which a mid-Victorian wig, kept in place by a band of plaits around the brow, was not unbecoming. Nevertheless, Aunt Emily was entirely modern, modern with that up-to-date femininity which with regard to men takes its key from the bee's impulse toward the drone, stinging him to death once he has fulfilled his functions.

It was a help to Edith that Aunt Emily could enter into the sufferings entailed by an outraged love without being hampered by the weaknesses inherent in the love itself. She could afford to be detached and impartial, bringing to bear on the situation the interest

every intelligent person takes in drama. For her participation Edith felt she couldn't be too grateful to a relative on whom she had no urgent claim beyond the fact that she was now her only one. Aunt Emily's clear vision might, indeed, be said to have found the way through a tangle of poignant conditions in which her own poor heart had been able to do nothing but fumble helplessly.

It was a way of sorrows, and there had been no choice but to take it. Chip had to be made to *feel*. Her whole being had become concentrated on that result. From it she had expected not only realization for him, but assuagement of longing for herself; and the latter hadn't come. She could hardly see that anything had come at all. If it were not for Aunt Emily she wouldn't have perceived that she had won a victory. Chip might realize now; she didn't know; she probably would never know; it was perhaps the impossibility of knowing that left her still unsatisfied. So long as the thing had not yet been done she had enjoyed at least the relief of action. She was challenging Chip, she was defying him; he was making her some sort of response, even when

it was made in silence. She was *the* one and he was *the* other, and there was an interplay of forces between them. Now all that was broken off; all that had come to an end. She was still *the* one; but there was no other. Where the other had been there was a blank, an emptiness. Her heart when it cried out to him produced the queer, creepy effect of a man talking to himself—there was no one to hear or to answer. There was a needle but no pole; there was a law of gravitation, but nothing to justify the power of attraction.

She was dazed, lost, which was the reason why in the following autumn she went abroad. She didn't know what else to do. Aunt Emily was rich and kind; but there were limits to hospitality. One had to feel that there was a world beneath one's feet, and Europe seemed to be there for that purpose. Besides, it was easy to travel while the children were so young. The lawyer conveyed to Chip her intention of taking them, and returned with the father's consent. She was not bound to ask for this, but she considered it courteous to do so. If while she did it he chose to take the opportunity to recognize her continued existence by

an inquiry or a word—well, then, she said to herself with a sob, it was there for him to make use of. But he didn't take it. He maintained the silence on which he had fallen back ever since her final peremptory letter requesting him not to write to her—she wondered if she had made it more peremptory than she had intended!—and so she sailed away without so much as a gift from him to the children. She could hardly bear to look at the shore of the continent that held him as it faded out of sight, so bitterly she resented what she now called his callousness.

When the cold weather came she established herself at Cap d'Ail, where the lofty perch of the hotel above Monaco and the Mediterranean seemed to lift her into a region of friendly, flowery peace. She enjoyed this as much as she could enjoy anything. No echo of the past reached her here, and it was an unexpected relief to be away from Aunt Emily's bursts of triumph and felicitation. With a book she hardly looked at in her hand she could sit at her window or on the terrace, soothed incomprehensibly by the blue-green sweep of the immemorial sea beside which so many other sad hearts had watched

before her own. She felt herself caught into a fellowship that included not only Hagar and Hecuba, but myriads of unremembered women whose tears alone might have filled this vast inland ocean—drawing a comfort that was not wholly morbid from the reflection that there was an end even to the breaking of hearts.

Here in this high, sequestered spot, which nevertheless preserved the *mondanités* to which she was accustomed, she would gladly have spent the winter alone with her children and their governess had there not arrived at the hotel a woman she had known for many years and who was in a position oddly similar to her own. At school she had been Gertie Cottle. In New York she was Mrs. Harry Scadding. She was now Mrs. G. Cottle Scadding for purposes of exact identification. She also had "freed herself"; she also had had a snapshot in the cheaper dailies; she also traveled with two children. It was impossible for Edith not to meet her and engage in amicable conversations, during which the lady talked freely of her "case," discussing the merits and demerits of her "co-," as though that person had been a kind of partner.

She was a lively young woman, frank and amusing. Moreover, she knew the people who made up Edith's small world, and Edith was lonely. While the two sets of children played together the two mothers sat on the terrace and talked. It was talk in which Edith was chiefly a listener, but a listener who couldn't deny that she was entertained. She was uncomfortable only when discerning compatriots appeared, and with visible nods and smiles rated them as "two of a kind." It was a kind over which she and Chip had smiled and nodded many a time during their wanderings in Europe, never thinking that she herself should ever be classed in the number.

She had been able to take the situation lightly then—this curious situation of the "freed" American wife, with or without children, drifting through Europe, aimless, and generally better off when friendless. But she began to be sorry for the type. Instead of shrinking from Gertie in the presence of the discerning compatriots, as she was at first inclined to do, she made it a point to be seen with her, championing the sisterhood of loneliness. There were moments when this association might not

have been discreet; but they were also moments in which—so it seemed to Edith—discretion was not a part of valor. Once or twice she accompanied her friend to Nice; once or twice to Monte Carlo. On each of these occasions she found herself in a gathering of cosmopolitan odds and ends in which she was not at ease; but championship being new to her, she felt obliged to take its bitter with its sweet. That it was mostly bitter gave her additional ground of complaint against Chip. He had driven her to a kind of deterioration, a deterioration she couldn't define, but of which, as of something noxious in the atmosphere, she was conscious during every moment spent in her friend's society.

She grew fanciful with regard to the other Americans in the hotel. She imagined they slighted her, or disapproved of her, or watched her course with misgiving. With a family of good, simple people, who apparently had nothing to strive for with the restlessness which characterized the social fag-ends whom she was now in the habit of meeting, she would have been glad to establish relations; but she never got beyond an occasional bow or smile, generally

over some incident connected with the children. Of one man she was afraid. She was afraid of him without knowing why, except that he seemed to watch her rather pityingly. She resented the pity; she resented his watching her at all. And yet . . .

If he hadn't been a grave man, evidently occupied with grave affairs, her resentment might have become annoyance. In the circumstances it was resentment modified by a little gratitude. She hardly understood her gratitude unless it was for a hint of solicitude in a world where no one seemed to bother about her any more. He did bother about her. She grew sure of that. Not for an instant could she think of the quiet, rather wistful, regard with which she caught him following her or the children as being meant otherwise than kindly.

She had no idea who he was. All she could affirm from distant and somewhat superficial observation was that he was Somebody—Somebody of position, experience, and judgment—Somebody to respect. She thought, too, that he must be Somebody of distinction, partly because he looked it, and partly because he was

served by a valet and a secretary scarcely less distinguished than himself. All three were serious men well into the forties. The valet was English, the secretary French, the master American. She would not, however, have taken the last-named for a fellow-countryman if she had not accidentally heard him speak. In regard to externals he was as nearly as possible denationalized. He had evidently lived a long time abroad, though he bore no one country's special stamp. He roused her curiosity, even while the kind of interest in herself which she attributed to him—with what she admitted were the most shadowy of reasons—hurt her pride. It hurt it in a manner to make her the more resolute in going her own way.

Not that it was a really reprehensible way. The worst that could be said of it was that it brought her into contacts and promiscuities from which she should have been kept free. Even so no great harm had been done, especially in the case of a woman with her knowledge of the world. None had been so much as threatened until the arrival on the scene of a young Frenchman, a friend of Mrs. Scadding's. Edith then found it necessary to submit to an

introduction with daily, almost hourly, hazards of encounter.

He was a young Frenchman like many hundreds of his kind, who might have been a finished sketch in sepia. Sepia would have done justice to the even tan of his complexion, to the soft-brown of his eyes, of his hair, of his mustache, and rendered the rich chestnut which was oftener than not his choice for clothes. Gertie flirted with him outrageously—there was no other phrase for it. It was the kind of flirting one was obliged to consider innocent, since the alternative would have been too appalling. Edith opted for the innocent construction, lending an abashed countenance to the situation out of loyalty to the sisterhood of loneliness. It was a countenance that grew more abashed whenever, in the process of lending it, her eye met that of the man who had constituted himself, she was convinced, her silent guardian.

Fortunately, Mrs. G. Cottle Scadding took herself off to Italy, the young Frenchman disappearing at the same time. It was a new proof to Edith of the depth of need to which she had come down that she missed them.

She missed their frivolity and inconsequentiality because they were the only interests she had. She was thrown back, therefore, on her own desolation and on her memories of Chip.

She made the discovery with some alarm that Chip was becoming to her more and more the center of a group of memories. She was losing him. That is, she was losing him as an actuality; she was losing him as the pivot round which her life had swung, even since her knowledge of his great treason. She was no more appalled by the loss than by the perception of her own volatility.

It was a perception that deepened when, some fortnight after Gertie's departure, the young Frenchman reappeared. "He's come back on my account," was Edith's instant reflection. She was indignant; and yet something else stirred in her that was not indignation, and to which she was afraid to give a name. Perhaps there was no name to give it. As far as she could analyze its elements, they lay in the twin facts that she was still young enough to be attractive to men and to find pleasure in her attractiveness. It was a pleas-

ure that raised its head timidly, apologetically; but it raised it none the less.

It was a new and terrifying thought that Chip might not always be the only man in her life. She had dedicated herself to him so entirely that it was difficult to accept the idea that any part of her might have been held in reserve for future possibilities. That her life should have been blasted was bad enough; but that it should renew its vigor and put forth shoots for a second bloom was frightful. Yet there was the fact that such things happened. Women in her position even married again. *She* might marry again. She never would—of course! But remarriage was among the potentialities of the new conditions she had achieved. The full comprehension of this liberty filled her with dismay.

Up to the present the knowledge that she possessed it had been theoretic only. The young Frenchman brought home to her the fact that she could act on it if she were ever so inclined. Not that he asked her to do so. He had only reached the point of inviting her to dine with him at Monte Carlo and look in at the gaming afterward. She declined this

invitation gently and without rancor toward him; but, in the idiom she used in talking with him, it gave her to think.

It gave her to realize also. The moment was rich in revelations concerning herself. She discovered she was a woman whom a relatively strange man might invite to dine with him alone. She had passed out of the fellowship of Hagar and Hecuba to enter that of Mrs. G. Cottle Scadding. This had happened, she hardly knew how. She discovered, moreover, that now that it had happened, she was scarcely shocked. Somehow it seemed in the nature of things—these curious new things she had created for herself—that she should be invited in this way to Ciro's and that there might be similar incidents to follow. She certainly was not shocked. Deep down in her heart something—was it something feminine? or was it something broadly human?—was secretly shamefully flattered. She couldn't blame the young fellow. She couldn't blame Gertie—very much. She might blame herself for being drawn into Gertie's company, and yet what other course could she have taken? She had known Gertie since they were school-girls.

When all was said and done Gertie was as good as she—in whatever met the eye. One divorced woman could hardly draw her skirts away from another. The longer she reflected the more clearly she saw that she couldn't have done anything but what she had done without becoming in her own eyes a hypocrite or a prude, and so she had laid herself open to hearing those words, spoken ever so respectfully, with a sympathy no American could have approached:

"Madame is so lonely. Madame is too much by herself. Wouldn't it *distraire* Madame to dine to-night, let us say, at Ciro's, or the Hotel de Paris, and look in at the Casino afterward? Madame is always so sad."

The man was too insignificant for her wrath, but not so insignificant that he couldn't be a warning. He was a warning that even if he failed to touch her heart it was by no means certain that another man might not succeed; and not long afterward a man did.

That was Sir Noel Ordway. She had met him almost at once after moving to Cannes. She moved to Cannes practically on the advice of the distinguished stranger who continued to

follow her with eyes of brooding concern. That is, what he said amounted to advice. It was, in a measure, to show him that she appreciated an interest in which there was an element that touched her profoundly that she accepted it.

She met him suddenly at one of the many turnings in the long flight of steps that descend from the hotel at Cap d'Ail to the station, and what there is in the way of town. She had never come abruptly face to face with him before. She knew she colored and betrayed a ridiculous self-consciousness. He, on his part, was unruffled and sedate, lifting his hat with the somewhat rigid dignity that characterized all his movements.

"Mrs. Chipman Walker, I think."

She acknowledged the words by a slight inclination. He mentioned his own name, which she knew already.

"I've just been seeing some friends of yours," he went on, calmly, "at Cannes. I've been lunching with the Misses Partridge."

"Oh, they're there?" It was to say something, no matter what, to cover up her absurd confusion that she added, "They're friends of my aunt's."

"I, too, have the pleasure of knowing Miss Winfield, which will perhaps excuse my self-introduction." She answered this by another slight inclination, while he continued: "The Misses Partridge asked me to say that they would be glad to see you, if you could ever make it convenient to go over. They wished me to add that they'd come to see you, but that, unfortunately, neither is quite well enough. You'd find them at the Villa Victoire, on the Route de Fréjus."

She was murmuring something to the effect that she would go at once, when he said in a tone that struck her as significant:

"It's very pleasant at Cannes—more so than here."

She didn't resent this, perhaps because her need was too great. Besides, there was something about him—it might have been the tenderness of a man who himself knew what suffering was—that put him outside the region of resentments. She only said: "Indeed? Why?"

"You'll see that when you go. For one thing, it's further removed from the atmosphere that comes up to us from—down there." He pointed

toward Monte Carlo. "In that way it's—healthier."

She knew that as she thanked him and passed on she smiled, and that she did so from lightness of heart. Certainly her heart was less heavy. It was less heavy because of his kindness, because of this indication that some one cared what became of her. She felt so forsaken that almost anybody's kindness would have had the same effect, almost anybody's care for her welfare; and so she came to respond to the appeal of Noel Ordway.

He sat beside her the first Sunday she lunched at the Villa Victoire. The Misses Partridge "knew every one." Of few people in either hemisphere could the expression be used with no more exaggeration. Possessing little in the way of means, less in that of accomplishments, and nothing at all in the line of looks, they had formed a vast circle of acquaintance, chiefly by a hearty, unaffected interest in each individual personality. No one, however unimportant, was ever forgotten by them. Miss Rosamond, who looked like a coachman, spent her time in correspondence, rounding up absent friends; Miss Gladys, who was thin and angular, coursed

whatever neighborhood they happened to be in, getting the nice people to come and see them. For reasons not always clear to the superficial the nice people came and sent others. No two ladies ever received so many letters of introduction, or wrote them. Their Sunday luncheons at Cannes were as famous as their Sunday dinners in New York.

In New York Edith had fought shy of them, mainly because Chip didn't do them justice. He spoke of them flippantly as "those two old flyaways," and would never go to their house. For this reason she herself went rarely, though when she did she got a perception of broad social inclusiveness which Chip could hardly appreciate. It was the only house she knew of in which there were no "sets," and where one met the most interesting people of all walks in life. She often wondered how the Misses Partridge, with their slight resources, physical and material, accomplished it, envying them somewhat their success. She wondered less, and envied them less, after she had seen them at Cannes.

Miss Rosamond's deep bass voice, the perfect expression of her red face and man-like

way of dressing, were the first influence in winning her. "My dear, there's the very hotel for you close beside us, where we could see you all the time. We stay there ourselves when we're opening and closing the villa. Big garden for the children—runs right down to the sea—and nothing but nice people of your own kind."

Edith couldn't help the suspicion that the distinguished stranger at Cap d'Ail had inspired Miss Partridge's solicitude, but neither did she resent this. Miss Gladys accompanied her to the hotel in question, to bring her personal powers to bear on the proprietor, and to help in the selection of rooms, so that next day Edith was able to move over. In this way it happened that on the following Sunday she found herself seated beside Sir Noel Ordway.

The luncheon party was again a collection of cosmopolitan odds and ends—but with a difference. There was a foreign royalty with his morganatic wife, the American wife of an English peer, two or three notable Russians, a French painter of international fame, together with some half-dozen English and Americans

of no importance, among whom Edith classed herself and the young Englishman beside her.

Between him and her the friendship ripened rapidly and unexpectedly. It was so unexpectedly that it took her off her guard. It was beyond all the possibilities her imagination could foresee that he should fall in love with her—a woman who had had her tragic experience, of no great beauty, the mother of two children. It was, in fact, through the children that he made his approaches, in as far as he made them intentionally. She judged that he didn't do that, that he was caught unawares, like herself. He had merely expressed a "liking for kids," and offered to take the youngsters for an outing in his motor-car on the following day. The kids were to go with their governess; but when he drove up to the door, and Edith had come out to see them off, it seemed ridiculous that she shouldn't accompany them. Besides, the governess was young and pretty, necessitating an elderly person for purposes of propriety. It was partly, too, in thoughtlessness that Edith yielded to his persuasion and, putting on a thick coat, jumped in with the rest.

He acted as his own chauffeur, and they drove up the new road through the Esterels. Edith sat beside him, and as they talked little she was able to observe him to better effect than on the previous day. She took him to be a year or two younger than herself, tall and slight, with a stoop he had probably acquired at Eton. She had understood from Miss Partridge that he was delicate; and he looked it. The circumstance had kept him from entering the army or going into diplomacy, sending him to the Riviera for his winters. He was blue-eyed and blond, with a ragged mustache too thin to conceal the rather pathetic line of the mouth. A long, thin nose, with an upper lip so short that the flash of teeth was visible even when the mouth was in repose, gave him the appearance of an extremely aristocratic rodent.

The drive was repeated a day or two later, and longer excursions came after that—to St. Raphael, to Valescure, and as far away as Mentone and the Gorges du Loup. Edith couldn't help liking the young man, first for his kindness to the children, and then for himself. For himself she liked him because he was so simple, straightforward, and sincere.

He grew confidential as time went on, telling her of his home, his mother, his sisters, his duties as squire and lord of the manor, and the bore it was to be kept out of a profession and away from England at the very moment of the hunting. He formed the habit of dropping in so frequently to tea with her, in the little sun-pavilion of the hotel, that she fancied the Misses Partridge, who were friends of Lady Ordway's, began to look uneasy. She wondered if they had given the young man all the information concerning her that was his due.

She made up her mind to ask. Once the fact was recognized it would be a safeguard, in that any possibilities of their being other than friends would be out of the way. He gave her the opportunity one afternoon in March by asking where she thought of going after she left Cannes. The children and the governess had had tea with them, but had strolled into the garden. Other occupants of the sun-pavilion had also wandered out among the pansy-beds and the blossoming mimosas. Edith took her time before answering.

"I don't know," she said at last. "It's so hard for me to make plans. You see, there's

nothing to hinder me from going to Sweden, Switzerland, or Spain; and when that's the case you're indifferent about going anywhere." She waited a few seconds before saying, "You know about me, don't you?"

"Rather," he said, promptly. "I've known that all along."

The reply was so downright that she was sorry she had raised the subject. He seemed to imply that as far as he was concerned the peculiarities in her situation were of no importance. As she was obliged to say something, she could only express a measure of relief.

"I'm glad of that. I hoped Miss Partridge would tell you."

He startled her by saying, with the bluntness that was curiously, but characteristically, at variance with the hesitations of his general manner:

"You could get married again, couldn't you?"

"Oh no." She blushed helplessly.

"Oh, but you could."

She struggled to keep to the ground of mere discussion. "I could legally; but I never should."

"Why?"

"Oh, for a lot of reasons I can't talk about."

"Then what did you do it for?"

She managed a smile, even if it was a forced and feeble one. She understood what he meant by "it."

"I don't have to explain that, do I?"

"No, I suppose not." She hoped he was going to drop the subject, when he lifted his head to look at her with his rather pathetic blue eyes. "Oh, but I say, you're not serious in thinking you wouldn't, are you?"

"Perfectly serious. I should never look on the matter as admitting discussion."

"Oh, but it does, you know."

"Not for me."

"Well, it might not for you, and yet might for—for other people."

She still forced an unsteady smile. "That's something I don't have to worry about, at any rate. I've given up thinking of other people's opinions."

"I don't mean other people in general—only in particular."

"I don't know any other people—in particular."

"Yes, you do. You know me."

"I only know you—like that." She snapped her fingers so as to give him an idea of the entirely transitory nature of their acquaintance.

"That isn't the way I know you."

"Oh, you don't know me at all. You couldn't. You're too young. I belong to another generation in point of time, and to ages ago in the matter of experience."

"How old *are* you?"

She told him.

"You're eighteen months older than I; but that's nothing. My mother was four *years* older than my father—nearer five. That sort of thing often runs in families."

She sprang up. "There's Chippie tramping all over that flower-bed. How *can* Miss Chesley?"

The negligence of Miss Chesley enabled her to make her escape, and when he rejoined her in the garden he accepted the diversion her ingenuity had found. In a short time he took his leave with no more display of emotion than on previous occasions.

But he left her troubled and shaken. He left her with the feeling that the foundations

of life, as she was leading it, were insecure. Where she had thought she was strong and determined she began to see she was weak and irresolute. She began to see herself as a woman with such an instinctive need of protection that sooner or later she would accept it—from some one. If from any one, why not from this man? She liked him; she was sure of his goodness and kindness. He was already fond of the children, and the children of him. Moreover, she could be a mother to him, and he needed mothering, as any one could see. It might not be a romantic marriage, but it could easily be an ideal one, as far as anything ideal still lay within the range of her possibilities. It could be ideal in the sense of a sincere affection both on his side and hers, and a common life for perhaps higher aims than she had lived with Chip.

It would doubtless be the final stage to the process of making Chip understand. She wouldn't marry—she couldn't—without some inner reference to him, without a vital reference to him. If she did marry he would know at last to what he had forced her. He would have forced her to looking to another man for

what she should have had from him—and then he would be repentant. Surely he would be repentant then! If he wasn't he would never be. All her efforts would have become in vain. She would feel that for any good she had accomplished she might as well have stayed with him. That thought choked her with its implication of agony escaped—and bliss forfeited.

But it was looking too far ahead. Everything was looking too far ahead. Noel Ordway had not asked her to marry him—and might never do so. She might have scared him off. She hoped she had. That would be simpler. She was not so inexperienced as to be without the knowledge that marriage with him would raise as many difficulties as it would settle—perhaps more. The day came when she had to point that out to him.

But it did not come at once. Nearly a week passed without his return. For Edith it was a week of some disappointment, and a good deal of relief. If she wasn't the happier for his absence, she was more at ease. She could be at ease till the time came for moving on in one direction or another, when she would be

oppressed anew with the sense of her helplessness. It became clearer to her that if she married at all it would be to be taken care of.

The question was put formally before her at a moment when she was least expecting it. It was an afternoon late in March when she was struggling along the Boulevard du Midi, in the teeth of a warm west wind. On her left children played in the sands or threw sticks or bruised flowers into the huge breakers to see them rolled shoreward. On her right the palms in the villa gardens bowed their heads eastward, while the mimosas tossed their yellow branches wildly. Before her the Esterels formed a jagged line of indigo flecked with red, above which masses of stormy orange cloud broke along the edges into pink. It was still far from the hour of sunset, though the glamour of sunset was gathering in the air.

She heard his step behind her scarcely an instant before he spoke.

"Oh, I say, Mrs. Walker, I want you to marry me."

The statement was so startling that in spite of all her preparatory discussion with herself,

she turned on him tragically. "For God's sake, why?"

"Well, because I'm awfully fond of you, you know."

His expression touched her. There was no mistaking the kindliness in his eyes, or the look of rather wan beseeching in his thin, pinched face. In his golfing suit of Harris tweed he was not an unattractive figure, even if he wasn't handsome.

Again her words had little relation to the things she had thought of beforehand. Her heart was so much with him that she spoke with an emotion she had never shown to him before.

"Even if you are, don't you see, dear friend, that you can't marry me?"

"Oh, but I can, you know."

She looked about her for a refuge where they could talk, finding it in a rough shelter designed for the protection of nurses watching children playing on the sands. It was empty for the moment, except for a tiny, bare-legged girl of three or four crooning over a big doll. Edith led the way. "Come over here." They sat down on a bench hacked with initials and cleanly dirty with sand. The little girl at the other

end of the bench rolled her big eyes toward them with indifference, continuing to croon to her doll:

"*Dors, mon enfant; dors, dors; ta mère est allée au bal. . . . Dors, mon enfant, dors; ta mère est au théâtre. . . . Tais-toi; tais-toi; ta mère dîne au restaurant. . . . Dors, ma chérie, dors.*"

Edith plunged into her subject as soon as they were seated and turned toward each other. "Tell me. If you married a divorced woman, wouldn't your whole position in England be—be different?"

"I shouldn't care anything about that."

"That's not what I'm asking you. I'm asking you if there wouldn't be ways in which it would be hard for you?"

The honesty in his eyes pierced her like a pain. "I shouldn't be thinking about that, you know. I should be thinking about you."

"Well, then, aren't there ways in which it would be hard for me?"

"Not any harder than it is now. It's pretty hard, isn't it?"

The tears sprang into her eyes, but she knew she must control herself. "Yes; but it's in the way of the ills I know. The ills I know not of might be worse."

"Oh, well, they wouldn't be that, you know."

"What about your people?" She sprang the question on him suddenly.

"They'd be all right—in time."

The qualification was like a stab. She spoke proudly. "I'm afraid I couldn't wait for that."

"You wouldn't have to wait for anything. They'd jolly well have to put up with what I decided to do. I've got all the say, you know. I'm the head of the family."

"Yes, *you* might look at it in that way; but you can easily see what it would be to me to enter a family where I wasn't wanted."

"That's a bit strong," he corrected. "They'd want you right enough, once they knew you. It would only be the—the fact of—the—"

She helped him out. "The divorce."

He nodded and finished. "That they'd jib at. Even then—"

"Oh, please don't think I'm blaming them. I should do exactly the same, in their case."

"They're really not half bad, you know," he tried to explain. "Mother's an awfully decent sort, and so is Di. Aggie's a bit catfish. But then she'll soon be married. Fellow named

Jenkins, in the Guards. And then," he added, irrelevantly, "you're an American."

"Which is another disadvantage."

"No," he said, with emphasis. "The other way round when it comes to a—a—" He stumbled at the word, but faced it eventually: "When it comes to a divorce, you know."

She looked at him mistily. "No, I don't know. Aren't a divorced Englishwoman and a divorced American in very much the same position?"

He hastened to reassure her. "Oh, Lord, no. Not in England they wouldn't be. A divorced Englishwoman—well, she's in rather a hole, you know; whereas a divorced American woman—that's natural."

"I see," she responded, slowly. "It's not considered quite so bad."

"Oh, not half so bad. One expects an American woman to be divorced—or something."

She couldn't be annoyed with him because he was so honest and ingenuous. She merely said, "So they'd think me the rule rather than the exception."

"They'd just think you were American, and let it go at that. Besides," he continued, ear-

nestly, "when a woman's only been married in America—"

"She's been hardly married at all. Is that what they'd think in England?"

"Well, if they'd ever seen the chap around—But when they haven't, you know—"

"They can't believe in him."

"Oh, I don't say that. But—well, they wouldn't think anything about him."

She shifted her ground slightly. "But you'd think about him, wouldn't you?"

"Me? Why should *I*?"

"Because I'd married him before I'd married you—for one thing."

"Oh, but I shouldn't go into that, you know. That would be over and done with."

"Would it?"

"Well, wouldn't it?"

She mused silently, while the little girl with the bare legs continued to croon to her doll with a kind of chant:

"*Dors, mon enfant, dors. . . . Ta mère ne reviendra plus ce soir. . . . Elle dîne avec le beau monsieur que tu as vu. . . . Elle te dira bonne nuit demain. . . . Dors; sois sage—et dors.*"

"Even if it were over and done with," Edith

said at last, "the fact would remain—supposing I married you—that your wife had had a life in which you possessed no share—a very living life, I assure you—and that her memories of that life were perhaps the most vital thing about her."

"Oh, but I say!" he protested. "That's the very reason I'm so fond of you. I can see all that already. I shouldn't interfere with it, you know. It's what makes the difference between you and other women. It's like the difference between—" He sought for a simile. "It's like the difference between a book that's been written and printed, and has something in it, and a silly blank book."

Her eyes filled with tears. "I wonder if you have the least idea of what you're saying?"

He sought for a more effective figure of speech. "If you were walking about your place, and found something wounded, you'd want to take it home and tend it, wouldn't you, till you'd put it to rights again? And the more you tended it the fonder of it you'd be. But you wouldn't stop to ask whether a boy had thrown a stone at it or whether it had been

attacked by its mate. You'd let all that alone —and just tend it."

Her tears were coursing freely now beneath her veil. "Is that really the way you feel about me?"

He grew apologetic. "Oh, I don't mean any Good Samaritan business, don't you know? If I could look after you a bit you'd do the same by me. I'm thinking of that, too. Look here," he pursued, confidentially, but coloring; "I'll tell you something, if you won't think me an ass. I could have married two or three girls—oh, more than that!—if I'd wanted to. But I could see what they were after. It wasn't me—not by a long shot. It was the place—Foljambe—it's really quite a decent place, you know—right in the shires—and the hunting. They'd have thought it awful luck to have to clear out of England every year, just when the hunting begins—and stick in this bally hole—or go to Egypt. But you wouldn't." As she said nothing for the minute, he insisted, "Would you, now?"

She shook her head musingly. "No, I shouldn't."

He looked relieved. "Well, that's just it.

That's just what I thought." He colored more deeply, with a heetic spot in each cheek. "Life isn't all beer and skittles to me, don't you know—and you'd be the kind of thing I haven't got, don't you know?" He leaned toward her beseechingly. "Do you see now?"

"I think I do. You mean that we'd mutually take care of each other."

"Well, that's what it would amount to—not to say any more about my being so awfully fond of you. You won't forget that."

She smiled through her tears. "Oh no; I'm not likely to forget it. I wish I could tell you—"

But she broke off because she could say no more, struggling to her feet. He agreed to her request that she should have time to think his proposal over, and also that he should let her return alone to the hotel, remaining in the shelter with the crooning child long after she had gone away.

But once she was out in the wind again she found it difficult to give the matter concentrated thought. Much as she had been moved while he talked to her, the emotion seemed to be blown away by the strong air of reality. It was like the crying in which she had sometimes

indulged herself at a play, and which left no aftermath of sadness. She could hardly tell what aftermath had been left by Noel Ordway's words; but as far as she could judge it had everything in it to touch her and appeal to her, except the possible. And yet so much that was impossible had happened to her already, who knew but that the next incredible thing would be that she should become mistress of Foljambe Park? Why not? Since the haven was open to her, and Chip had left the poor little craft of her life to toss in a sea too strong for it, why not creep into any refuge that would receive her? She would certainly be driven sooner or later into some such port—then why not into this?

She hurried homeward between the thundering breakers on the one hand and the tossing palms on the other, her mind in a state of storm. In the garden, as she passed toward the hotel, she saw Miss Chesley with the children, but she couldn't stop and speak to them. She hurried. She wanted the protection of her room, of quiet, of the accessories to mental peace. Perhaps when she got these she should be able to think —and decide; so she hurried on.

To avoid the main hall, where people might speak to her, she took the short cut through the sun-pavilion, which would bring her nearer to the stairs. But on throwing open the door she stood still on the threshold with a little soundless gasp. "Oh!"

He came toward her sedately, the glimmer of a smile on the stamped gravity of his face. "I took the liberty of waiting for you. I couldn't bring myself to go back to Cap d'Ail without knowing how you were."

As he held her hand he seemed to bend over her with what she had already described to herself as a brooding concern. She knew she was blushing foolishly and that her knees were trembling under her; and yet, curiously enough, the little craft of her life seemed suddenly to find itself in quiet waters, ranged round by protecting hills. She was confused and sorry and glad and afraid all in one instant. Nothing but the habit of the hostess, which was so strong in her, enabled her to capture a conventional tone and say the obvious thing:

"I'm so glad you waited. Won't you sit down, and let me ring for tea?"

III

REPROACH

CHIP had never really noticed her until on that Sunday morning in June it suddenly struck him that she was trying to get a word with him alone. He had seen her, of course. She had been at Mountain Brook—which was the name of Emery Bland's place in New Hampshire—every time he had gone there; but, her quality being unobtrusive, he had paid her no attention. Furthermore, both Bland and Mrs. Bland, being emphatic in personality and talkative, he had been the more easily led to ignore this reticent girl, whose function was apparently limited to seeing her aunt provided with a shawl, or her uncle with a cigar, at the right opportunities. If he thought of her at all, it was as of the living spirit of the furniture. The tables and chairs became animate in her, and articulate; but her claim to recognition had never gone beyond the necessity for

a hand-shake or a smile. When he did take her hand—on arriving, or on coming down-stairs in the morning—he received an impression of something soft and slim and tender; but the moment of pleasure was always too fleeting for conscious registration. Similarly, when, from a polite instinct to include her in the conversation, he smiled vaguely in her direction, he received a look gentle and beaming and almost apologetic in return; but it was never more to him than if the dimly lustrous surfaces of Mrs. Bland's niece Sheraton had suddenly become responsive. She made no demand; and he offered no more than she asked.

Perhaps the fact that the girl was not really the niece of either Mr. or Mrs. Bland had something to do with his tendency to treat her as a negligible quantity. Mrs. Bland had explained the situation to him during his first visit to Mountain Brook.

"Lily isn't our niece at all," she had said, in a tone which seemed to reproach Lily with an inadvertance. "She's no relation to us whatever. We don't know who she is. She doesn't even know herself. Since you insist," she continued, as though Chip had been pressing for

information, "we got her out of an orphanage, the year we built this house. Mr. Bland seemed to think the house ought to have something young in it; and so—"

"You might have had a dog," Chip said, dryly.

"You needn't laugh. It wasn't *my* desire to adopt a child. I simply yielded to Mr. Bland, as I do in everything. The only stipulation I made was that she should call us uncle and aunt. I couldn't bear to be called mother by a child who wasn't my own; but Mr. Bland is so odd that he wouldn't have cared. I dare say you've noticed how odd he is."

Chip could see that Bland might be odd from his wife's point of view. He was the self-made man who had shed the traces of self-making. Mrs. Bland was fond of describing herself as a self-made woman; but the stages of the process by which she had "turned herself out" were visible. She would have been disappointed had it not been so. Having confessed from youth upward that her ambition was "to make the most of herself," there had never, in her case, been any question of the *ars celare artem*. She belonged to a number of

women's clubs of which the avowed object was "self-improvement," and attended such classes on "current events" as would keep her posted on the problems of the day without the bore of reading the papers. As a self-made woman she also looked the part, dressing for breakfast as she would like to be found in the afternoon, with but slight variation for dinner. In her full panoply of plum or dove color she suggested one of those knights eternally in armor who decorate baronial halls. Chip considered it probable that Emery Bland would never have chosen her as the life-long complement to himself had he not taken that step while he was still an obscure "up-state" country lawyer, and she the dignified young school-teacher who stood for "cultivation" in their little town. Cultivation had always been to Mrs. Bland what hunting is to the rider to hounds—the zest was in the chase. The zest was in the chase, and the quarry but an excuse for the run. Over hedges of lectures, and ditches of "talks," and through turnip-fields of serious, ponderous women like herself, green even in winter, and after being touched by frost, Mrs. Bland kept on in full career, with "cultivation"

scudding ahead like a fox she never caught a glimpse of, and which her hounds tracked only by the scent. It was splendid exercise, and helped her to feel in the movement. If she failed to notice that her husband had long ago run the fleet animal to earth, and affixed the mask as an adornment to his home, it was only because their views of life were different.

No one would now suppose that there had been a time in Emery Bland's life when it had been his aim also to "cultivate himself," and when he had actually used the phrase. Between the debonair, experienced New York lawyer, so much in demand for cases requiring discretion and so capable of dealing with them —between him and the farmer's boy he had been there was no more resemblance than between a living word and the dead root out of which it has been coined. In Emery Bland's case the word was not only living, but pliant, eloquent, and arresting to ear and eye. He was one of those men who overlook nothing that can be counted as self-expression, from their dress to the sound of their syllables. Superficially genial, but essentially astute, he had made everything grist that came to his

mill, flourishing on it not only in the financial sense, but also in that of character. It was said that he knew as many life histories as a doctor or a priest, and generally the more dramatic ones. The experience had clearly made him cynical, but tolerant also, and human, with a tendency, as far as he was personally concerned, to being morally straitlaced. He had seen so much of the picturesque side of life that he could appreciate the prosaic, which, in Chip's explanation, was why he could stand by Mrs. Bland. Other people's surfeits of champagne and ortolans had assured his own taste for plain roast beef. But he himself ordered the porcelain on which his simple fare was served, and the wines by which it was accompanied, drunk from fine old Irish or Bohemian glass.

Chip took this in by degrees. His first acquaintance with a man who was to exercise some influence on his future was purely professional. He had gone to him as an offset to Aunt Emily. If the results of this move were indirect—since Aunt Emily had won the victory—they became apparent in time. They became apparent when in Chip's bruised heart, where

everything healthy seemed to have been stunned, a slight curiosity began to awaken concerning his new friend's personality.

He came to consider him a friend by accident—the accident of a club, where, finding themselves sitting down to dine at the same moment, they had taken the same table. Primarily, it was an opportunity to adjust some loose ends of Chip's domestic affairs; incidentally, they stumbled on a common hobby in Victorian English politics. There was no subject on which Emery Bland was better informed, with a learning that covered the whole long stretch from Lord Melbourne to Lord Salisbury, and which he could garnish with anecdote *ad libitum*. It was a kind of conversation of which Chip, who had been brought up partly in England, rarely got a taste in New York, and for which Bland, on his side, didn't often find an interested listener. Something like an intimacy thus sprang up, but an intimacy of the kind common among men who have little or no point of contact out of office hours or away from the neutral ground of the club. Within these limits the meetings had already been numerous before it occurred to Chip—

more or less idly—that while Bland knew too much of his sad background, he knew nothing of Bland's. An occasional reference revealed the lawyer as a married man, but beyond that basic fact their acquaintance had no more attachment to the main social structure of life than a floating island of moss and flowers has to the system of geological strata. It was Bland himself who took the first step in the direction of closer association.

"Well, how are you getting on?"

He asked the question while slipping into the seat opposite Chip as the latter lunched at the club, where they met most frequently.

"Oh, so so."

"H'm. So so. *That's* what you call it."

The tone implied reproach or reproof or expostulation. Chip kept his eyes on his knife and fork.

"Well, what do *you* call it?"

"Oh, I'm not obliged to give it a name. I hear other people do that."

"And what do other people say—since you seem to want me to ask the question?"

"I do. I think you ought to know. They say it's a pity."

Chip took on the defiant air of a bad boy. "They can say it—and go to blazes."

"They'll say it, all right. Don't you worry about that. But I rather think that you'll do the going to blazes—at this rate."

Chip raised his haggard eyes. "Well, why not? What is there any better than blazes for me to go to? Besides, it isn't so awful—when you've got nothing else."

"Oh, rot, Walker! I'm ashamed of you. I can imagine a man of your type doing almost anything else but taking to drink."

Chip shrugged his shoulders with the habit acquired in French schools. "*On fait ce que l'on peut.* I had three resources left to me—wine, woman, and song. For song I've no ear; for woman—well, that's all over; so it came down to Hobson's choice."

"Hobson's choice be blowed! Walker's choice! And you've just time enough left to cast about for a set of alternatives. Why, I've seen scores of men in your fix; and of some of them it was the salvation."

"And what was it of the others?"

"Hell. But it was a hell of their own making."

"All right. I'm willing to accept the word. It's a hell of *my* own making—but it's hell, just the same."

"But, good Lord! man, even if it is hell, you don't want to wallow in it."

Chip smiled ruefully. "Oh, I like it. Kind of penance. I like it as medieval sinners used to like a hair shirt."

"Yes; but the hair shirt was kept out of sight. You're parading your penance, as you call it, before the world. See here, Walker, why don't you come up and spend the week-end with me in New Hampshire? My wife would like to have you. To-day is Friday, and I go up to-morrow morning. A Sunday in the country would do you good."

Chip refused, but he long remembered why he retracted his refusal. It was the look of his apartment when he returned to it that night. It was an apartment in a house at the corner of Madison Avenue and a street in the Thirties, dedicated to the use of well-to-do bachelors. It had been a slight mitigation in the collapse of life as he had built it up, that rooms in so comfortable a refuge should have been free for him. He had furnished them with

some care; and after his first distress had worn off a little had found a measure of lawless satisfaction in a return to the old unmarried ways.

But on this particular evening the aspect of the place appalled him from the minute he turned his latch-key in the lock. Under the stimulus of Bland's counsels he had come home early, which was in itself a mistake. It was scarcely nine o'clock. There was an hour or an hour and a half to pass before he could think of going to bed. Any such interval as that was always the hardest feature in the day for him. But what smote him specially now was the air of emptiness and loneliness. It met him as an odor in the stale smell of the cigar he had smoked on coming up-town from the office, and which still lingered in the rooms. He had forgotten to open a window, and the house valet, whose duty it was to "tidy up," had evidently gone out.

In the small hall into which Chip entered there was a bookcase with but two or three odds and ends of books in it, for his habits of reading had dropped away from him with everything else. In the sitting-room one brown shoe stood on the hearth-rug before the empty fire-

place; the other on the center-table, a collar and necktie beside it. The soiled shirt he had thrown off lay on the couch, a sleeve dragging on the floor. On the mantelpiece, which he had at first consecrated as a shrine for the photographs of Edith and the children, and flanked by two silver candlesticks like an altar, there had intruded an open box of perfectos, an ash-tray that still held the butt-end of a cigar, and an empty tumbler smelling of whisky. There were traces of cigar ashes everywhere—on the arms of the easy-chairs, on the rugs, and on the terra-cotta tiles of the hearth. For the rest the room was a litter of newspapers, as the bedroom which opened off it was a litter of clothes.

He was not disorderly; he was only careless, and incapable of creating order for himself. Disorder shocked him profoundly. He always sat down in the midst of it, helpless, but with a sense of inner misery. And so he sat down in it now. "My God!" he said to himself, summing up in the ejaculation all the wretchedness he had wrought, or that had been wrought, about him.

It was at such minutes that his mind reverted

to Edith, with renewed stupefaction over what she had done. Stupefaction was the word. Reflection on the subject only left him the more hopelessly bewildered. If she hadn't loved him her course might have been explicable. As it was, he found himself driven to a choice between mental aberration on her part and a witch's spell, inclining to the latter—with the witch in the guise of Aunt Emily.

Not that he absolved himself. He made no attempt to do that. But he looked upon his offense as of the kind that naturally calls for mercy rather than severity. What was the letter of the contract in comparison with the spirit?—and he had kept the spirit sacredly. Of course he had done wrong. Who in thunder, he asked, impatiently, ever denied that? But how many men had not done wrong in the same way? Very few, was his answer. The answer was the essence of his defense—a defense which, according to all the laws of human nature and common sense, Edith should have accepted. That she shouldn't accept it, or couldn't, or wouldn't, passed his comprehension.

As a rule, he tried not to think of it. He

tried not to think of it by filling up the time with something else. When there had been nothing else to fill up the time he had stupefied himself with drink. He drank at first, not because he liked drinking, but because it dulled his brain, his heart. It didn't excite him; on the contrary, it brought him to a state of lethargy which, if he was at the club, made him willing to go home, or, if he was at home, made it possible for him to go to bed and sleep. It was only within a month or so that he had begun to suspect that other people noticed it; and even then he hadn't been sure until Bland had told him so that day.

He had, consequently, come back to his room in the possession of his faculties, but with a feeling of something unfulfilled that emphasized his desolation. He perceived then that a habit was beginning to form in him with a tenacity which it might be difficult to counteract. After all, would anything be gained by counteracting it? He had known fellows who drank themselves to death; and except in the last dreadful stages it hadn't been so bad. They had certainly got their fun out of it, even if in the end they paid high. He was paying high—and

perhaps getting nothing at all. Wouldn't it be better if he went off this minute somewhere, and made a night of it?—made a night which would be but the beginning of a long succession of nights of the same kind? Then when he was ruined beyond recovery, or in his grave, Edith would know what she had done to him. He had tried every other way of bringing it home to her but that. That might succeed where argument had failed. She couldn't have a mind so much astray as not to be sorry when she saw, or heard of, the wreck she would have made of him.

It was worth thinking of, and he sat and thought of it. He tried to conjure up the picture of himself as really besotted—he was not besotted as yet, even when the worst was said!—degraded, revolting. He rose to take a cigar, to help his imagination in the task to which he had set it, but he remembered that the cigar suggested a whisky-and-soda to go with it, and there was a bottle of Old Piper in the cupboard. He fell back into his seat again with the longing unsatisfied, but he continued his dream. It was so pleasant a dream—that is, there were so many advantages to the course

he thought of taking, that he ended by springing to his feet and saying, almost aloud, "By God, I'll do it."

The resolution being formed, there was a large selection of ways and means of putting it into execution. He could do this or that. He could go here or there. It was a bewilderment of choice that saved him. He sat down again.

No; when it came to the point he wasn't equal to it. It was not the end he shrank from, but the means—the places to which he would have to go, the people he would have to consort with. He knew just enough of them to be sickened in advance. It was with a sense of fleeing to escape that he hurried to the telephone and called up Emery Bland, asking to be allowed to accept his invitation.

He arrived at Mountain Brook late on an afternoon in early June, just as the sun, hovering above the point of its setting, was throwing an almost horizontal light on the northern and western slopes of Monadnock. The mountain raised its majestic mass as the last and successful effort of a tumbling, climbing wilderness of hills. Scattered amid the upward-sweeping

stretches of maple and oak, groves of spruce and pine had the effect of passing rain-clouds. In the clear air, against the clear sky, every tree-top on the indented ridges stood out like a little pinnacle, till with a long, downward curve, both gracious and grandiose, the mountainside fell to the edge of a gem-like, broken-shored lake. It was a world extraordinarily green and clean. Its cleanness was even more amazing than its greenness. The unsullied freshness of a new creation seemed to lie on it all day long. It was a world which suggested no past and boded no future. Its transparent air, in which there was not a shred of atmosphere, its high lights, and long shadows, and restful, clambering woods, and singing birds, and sweet, strong winds were like those of some perpetual, paradisical present, with no story to tell, and none that would ever be enacted. It was a world in which Nature seemed to hold herself aloof from man, refusing to be tamed by him, rejecting his caress, keeping herself serene, inviolate, making his presence incongruous with her sanctity.

It was this incongruity that struck Chip first of all. Not that there were any of the unap-

proachable grandeurs of the Alps or the Selkirks, nor anything that towered or terrified or overawed. All the hilly woodland was smiling and friendly—but remote. Man might buy a piece of ground and camp on it; but if he had sensibilities he would remain conscious of an essence that eluded him, the real thing—withdrawn. He could be on the spot, but he could never be of it—not any more than he could give his dwelling the air of springing from the soil.

Chip noticed that, too—the intrusive aspect of any kind of roof that man could make to cover him, unless it were a wigwam. Emery Bland had tried to temper this resentment of the landscape to what was not indigenous to itself by making the lines of his shelter as simple and as straight as possible. He was from the first apologetic to the Spirit of the Mountain, as who would say, "Hang it all, you've tempted me here, but I'll outrage you as little as I can." So he perched his long, white house, Italian in style if it had style at all, on the top of a knoll whence he could look far into green depths, with nothing in the way of excrescence but a tile-paved open-air dining-room at one end, and a shady spot of similar construction at

the other, getting his effects from proportion. Something in the way of lawn and garden he was obliged to have, and Mrs. Bland had insisted on a pergola. He fought the pergola for a year or two, but Mrs. Bland had had her way. A country house without a pergola, she said, was something she had never heard of. A *sine quâ non* was what she called it. So beyond the square of lawn with its border of flowers the pergola stretched its row of trim white wooden Doric pillars, while over the latticed roof and through it hung bine and vine, grape, wistaria, and kadsu. Below the pergola the land broke to a brook that gurgled through copses of alder, tangles of wild raspberry, and clumps of blueberry and goldenrod, carrying the waters of the lake to the Ashuelot, which bore them to the Connecticut, which swept them southward, till quietly, and almost as unobserved by the human eye as when they rose in the bosom of the hills, they fell into the sea.

As there was no other guest, Chip was allowed to do as he pleased. What he pleased was chiefly to sit in the pergola, where the mauve petals of the wistaria were dropping

about him, and fill his gaze with the mystic peace of the mountain. On Sunday morning the three Blands went to church, leaving him in sole possession of this green, cool world, with its quality of interpenetrating purity. He took a volume of some ambassador's "Recollections" from his host's shelves of Victorian memoirs; but he never opened it. He also took a cigar, but he didn't smoke. He only looked—looked without effort, almost without consciousness—up into the high wonderlands of peace, whence whatever was brooding there seemed to steal into his soul and cleanse it. It was this sense of cleansing that he carried back as a sort of possession to New York—that and the fact imparted by Mrs. Bland during the afternoon, regarded as unimportant, and yet retained, that Lily Bland was not their niece.

He returned to Mountain Brook twice during that summer, and in June of the following year. It was during this last visit that the girl who had been to him hitherto no more than the living element of the background gave him the impression that she was seeking an opportunity to speak to him.

Throughout Saturday it had been an im-

pression almost too faint to be recorded; but it was significant to him that on Sunday morning she didn't go to church. She shared the house with him, therefore, a fact of which he was scarcely aware till he saw her in possession of the pergola. With a book in her hand she had established herself in a chair not far from that which by preference he had made his own. The act roused his curiosity; but when he, too, had taken a book and strolled out to join her, she didn't keep him in suspense.

She closed her novel as he approached, looking up at him with simple directness. "I've something to tell you."

Behind the attention he gave to these words he registered the observation that when you looked at her—which he had rarely done—you saw she was pretty. Her white skin had a luminosity like that of satin, and the mouth was sweet with a timid, apologetic tenderness. The glances one got from her were almost too fleeting to show the color of the eyes, but he knew they must be blue. Her hair had been striking to him from the first, chiefly because it was of that hue for which there is no English word, but which the French call *cendré*—ashen—

something between flaxen and brown, but with no relation to either—that might have been bleached by a "treatment" only for its unmistakable gleam of life. It waved naturally over the brows from a central parting, and massed itself into a great coil behind. She was dressed simply in white linen, with a belt of "watered" blue silk, and neat, pointed cuffs of the same material.

Instinctively he knew that what she had to tell him must be important, for otherwise she would not have come out of the shy depths into which, like the Spirit of the Mountain, her life seemed to be withdrawn. What it could be he was unable even to guess at. He smiled, however, and, taking a casual tone so as not to strike too strong a note at first, he said, as he sat down, "Have you?"

She continued to speak with the same simple directness. "It's about some one you used to know."

He grew more grave. "Indeed? I should hardly have supposed that you could know any one—whom I *used* to know?"

"I do. I know— You won't mind my speaking right out, will you?"

"Of course not. Say anything you like."

"Well, I know Miss Maggie Clare."

"Great God!" He sank deeper into his wicker arm-chair, throwing one leg over the other. He seemed to shrink away and to look up at her from under his brows.

The shy serenity of her bearing was undisturbed. "I've got a message to you from her."

He was unable to keep the note of resentment out of his voice. "What?"

"She's very ill. I think she's going to die. She thinks so herself. She wants to know if—if you'd go and see her."

He slipped down deeper into his chair, his chin sunk into his fist. It was quite like the act of cowering. It was long before he spoke. When he did so the tone of resentment was more bitter. "Does she realize what she's done to me?"

"I think she does. In fact, it's the only thing she does realize very clearly now. She talks of it continually, in her dreamy way—but a way that's quite heartbreaking. I really think that if you were to see her—"

He looked up under his lids and brows as

she hesitated. "Well?" The tone was as savage as courtesy would let him make it.

"That you'd forgive her."

His body bounded to an upright attitude, his hands thrust deep into pockets. "No." If the word had been louder it would have been a shout. "I shall never forgive her."

There was no change in her sweet reasonableness. "I don't see what you gain by that."

"I gain this much—that I don't do it."

"I still can't see that it makes your situation any better, while it makes hers a good deal worse."

"If hers is worse, mine *is* better. The woman deliberately wrecked my life after I'd been kind to her—for years."

"The poor thing didn't do it deliberately, Mr. Walker. She did it because she couldn't help it—because she loved you so."

He shook himself impatiently. "Ah, what kind of love is that?"

The audacity of her response—the curious audacity of shyness—seemed to him extraordinary only when, later, he thought it over. "I dare say it isn't a very high kind of love—

but there was no question of its being that—from the first. Was there?"

"All the more reason then why she should have kept where she belonged."

"Yes, of course. And yet it's difficult for love to keep itself where it belongs when it's very—very consuming."

He leaned back in his chair, eying her. If he spoke roughly it was only because she had roused all his emotions on his own behalf, as well as a faint subconscious interest in herself. "Look here, Miss Bland. How much do you know about this?"

"Oh, I know all about it," she assured him, hurrying to explain, in answer to something she saw in his face: "Uncle Emery didn't tell me. I read it first in the papers—you remember there was a lot of talk about it in the papers—and then every one was talking of it. I couldn't help knowing. Uncle Emery," she added, "only told me one tiny little thing, which couldn't do any one any harm."

"And that was—?"

"Miss Clare's address. I asked him for it when I found that I—that I wanted to go and see her."

"And why on earth should you want to go and see her—a young girl like you?"

Her blush was like a color from outside reflected in the soft luster of her skin as a tint of sunset may be caught by the petals of certain white flowers.

"I had a reason. It wasn't doing any one any harm," she repeated, "not even you." In further self-defense she added: "Uncle Emery didn't disapprove, and I've never told Aunt Zena. But I've always been glad I went—very."

"Why?"

"Because she's a sort of charge of Uncle Emery's, for one thing—since you've put her in his care. I help *him* a little bit. And then the sister she lives with—you knew we'd got her to live with her sister, didn't you?—isn't very kind to her. It's just the money. And then," she continued, the soft color deepening, "I had another reason—more personal—that I'd rather not say anything about."

"I can't imagine anything in the whole bad business that could be personal to you."

"No, of course you can't. It's only personal by association—by imagination, probably."

She made nothing clearer by adding: "You know I'm not really Uncle Emery's niece, or Aunt Zena's."

He nodded.

"I don't know who my mother was. But whoever she was—I'm sorry for her."

He began to get her idea. "You're probably quite wrong," he said, kindly; "and until you know you're right I shouldn't let fancies of that sort run away with me."

"Oh, I don't. And yet you can see that when I meet any one like Maggie Clare—well, I don't feel superior to her. It's like being a gipsy—George Eliot's Fedalma, for instance—adopted by a kind family, but knowing she's a gipsy just the same."

He brought his knowledge of the world to bear on her. "I assure you you're not in the least like that kind of gipsy."

"Neither was Fedalma like her kind; and yet when she could do something for them she went to them and did it."

"How old are you?" he said, abruptly, asking the same question which but a few weeks before Noel Ordway had put to Edith, and in much the same way.

"We call it twenty-three—because we keep my birthday on the date on which Uncle Emery and Aunt Zena took me; but I must be nearer twenty-five."

He looked at her more attentively than he had ever done. She was not really shy; she wasn't even reserved; but she was repressed—repressed as any one might be who lived under the weight of Mrs. Bland's protesting, grudging kindliness. It came back to him now, the tone in which she had said, a year earlier, that she couldn't be called mother by a child who didn't belong to her. How that must have been "rubbed in" to the poor girl before him! Other things, too, came back to him, especially on Bland's part certain stolen moments of tenderness toward the girl, that had been interrupted in Chip's presence by a peremptory voice, saying, "Now, Emery, don't spoil the child," or "Lily, dear, *can't* you find anything better to do than tease your uncle?" In it all Chip had found two subjects of wonderment: first, the strange egoism of this middle-aged woman who could see nothing in the expansion of her husband's affections but what was stolen from herself; and then, the extraordinary freak

of marital loyalty that could keep a man like Emery Bland, with his refinement and his knowledge of the world, true to a woman whom he had once loved, no doubt, in a youthful way, but who was now his inferior by every token of character. A good enough woman she was of her kind; but it was no more her husband's kind than it was that of the gods immortal. What was the secret that kept these unequal yoke-fellows together, sympathetic, and tolerably happy, when he and Edith, who were made for each other, had by some force of mutual expulsion been thrust apart? Bland himself was of the type which, in the language that was almost more familiar to him than English, Chip would have called *charmeur;* and yet he deferred to this second-rate woman, and considered her, and even loved her in a placid, steady-going way, submitting at times to her dictation. Chip couldn't understand it. If he himself had been married to Mrs. Bland—But that was unthinkable. What wasn't unthinkable, and yet became the more bewildering the more he tried to work the problem out, was that he himself had failed to keep for his own the woman who suited him in every respect,

whose love he possessed and who possessed his, who was happy with him and he with her, while Emery Bland had contrived to make the most of the estimable but rather coarse-grained lady who sat at the head of his table, and have a truly enviable life with her. No one could be more keenly aware of the lady's shortcomings, which lay within the realm of taste and intelligence, than Bland himself. What was his secret? Was it a principle, or was it nothing but a lucky accident? Was it something in a cast of character or a tenet of a creed, or was it what any one could emulate?

These thoughts and questions passed rapidly through Chip's mind, not for the first time, during the two or three minutes in which there was no sound about them but the murmur of the brook, the humming of insects, and the whisper of the summer wind through millions of trees.

He reverted to Maggie Clare, the timbre of his voice again growing harder. "What's the matter with her?"

She was singularly gentle. "I suppose it could be described most accurately as a broken heart."

He flushed hotly. "Oh, don't say that," he cried, as if he had been stung.

"I shouldn't say it if it didn't answer your question."

"*I* didn't break her heart," he declared, in sharp aggressiveness of self-defense.

"Oh no. Even she doesn't think so. The poor thing hasn't much mind left, as you know; but what she has is concentrated on that point —that you were not to blame in anything. Please don't think that I'm in any way hinting at such an accusation."

He looked at her stupidly. "Then if her heart's broken, what's broken it?"

"The circumstances, I suppose. You don't seem to understand that the poor soul must long ago have reached a point where her love for you was absolutely the only thing she had."

Again he seemed to shake himself, as though to rid his body of something that had fastened on it. "I never *asked* her to love me like that. I never *wanted* it."

She smiled, faintly and sweetly. "Oh, well, that wouldn't make any difference. Love gives itself. It doesn't wait for permission. I should think you'd have known that."

He leaned forward, an arm resting on one knee. While he reflected he broke into the tuneless, almost inaudible, whistling Edith used to know so well. "I said I'd never see her again," he muttered, as the result of his meditation.

"May I ask if that was a promise to any one, or if it was something you just said to yourself and about which you'd have a right to change your mind?"

He continued to mutter. "I said it to—to my wife."

"As a promise? Please forgive me for asking. I shouldn't, only that the request of a dying woman—"

"I said it," he admitted, unwillingly; "but it wasn't exactly a promise. My wife said—" He stopped and bit his lip. "She said she didn't care."

"You can't go by that. Of course she did care."

"Then if she cared, I'd let twenty women die, whoever they were—"

She rose with dignity. "That must be for you to decide, Mr. Walker. I've given you the message I was charged with. It isn't a matter in which I could venture to urge you."

He, too, rose. "You do urge me," he said in a tone of complaint, "by thinking that I ought to go."

She looked him timidly, but steadily, in the eyes. "I'm not so sure that I do. The whole thing is too sacred to your own inner life for me to have an opinion. You must do what you think right, and Maggie Clare—"

"The woman ruined me," he cried, desperately.

"And must she bear all the responsibility of that?"

The words were accompanied by one of her swift, half-frightened smiles; but she didn't wait for an answer. Before Chip could begin to stammer out an explanation that would give his point of view she was passing rapidly up the pathway, bordered with irises and peonies and bleeding-hearts, toward the house.

But when he returned to town he went to see Maggie Clare. He went, and went again. The experience became, in its way, the most poignant in his life. He had not much knowledge of death and even less of sickness. The wasted face and the sunken, burning eyes wrought in him a kind of terror. It was with

an effort that he could take the long thin hand, that already had the chill of the grave in its limp fingers, into his own. As for kissing those bloodless lips, so eager, so strained, which he could see was what she wanted him to do, he was unable to bring himself to it. Luckily he was not obliged to talk, since her mind couldn't follow coherent sentences. It was enough for her to have him sit by the bed while she worked her hands gropingly toward him, saying, "Oh, Chip! oh, Chip!" and murmuring broken things in Swedish. It was incredible to him that this poor worn thing, this living shadow, that had exhausted everything but its passion for himself, had once been a woman whom he loved.

He was glad when she died and could be buried, so that he might consider that episode as ended—if there was ever an end to anything in this cursed life! And yet the occurrence brought him another kind of shock. In the death of one who for years had been so closely associated with his thoughts it was as if his own death had begun. He grew uneasy, morbid. Such occupations as he found to fill the hours when he was not at work grew insufficient. He came to hate the clubs, the restau-

rants, the theaters, and such social gatherings as he was now invited to. There was an evening when from sheer boredom he went home to his rooms as early as eight o'clock—and the bottle of Old Piper came out of its hiding-place.

The real struggle followed on that. He had not so far forgotten Emery Bland's warning as to cease to put up a fight; but he saw now that the fight would be a hard one. There was again a period in which he weighed the advantages of "going to the bad" with all sails set against a life of useless respectability. Going to the bad had the more to recommend it since he knew that Edith was in New York. His downfall might bring her back to him, in some such way, from some such motive of saving or pity, as that by which he himself had been brought to Maggie Clare.

The argument being in favor of Old Piper, Old Piper supported it. Chip never forgot an evening when, as he staggered down the steps of the club toward the taxi that had been called for him, he met Emery Bland, who was coming up. He would have dodged the lawyer without recognition had it not been for the

latter's kindly touch on his arm, while a voice of distress said: "Ah, poor old chap, what's this?"

He had just wit enough left to stammer: "Edith's in New York. Go and tell her how you saw me."

With that he staggered on, knowing that he almost fell into the waiting vehicle.

Worse days ensued—for nearly a week. Worse still might have followed had they not been cut short suddenly. They were cut short by a note which bore the signature, Lily Bland. It was a simple note, containing nothing but the request that he should come and see her on one of a choice of evenings which she named. He took the first one, which was that of the day of the note's arrival.

He had hardly seen her since their talk at Mountain Brook in the previous June. He had not gone again that summer to New Hampshire, and on the two or three occasions on which he had visited Bland's house in town she seemed to have retreated once more to her old place as the spirit of the furniture. He had made efforts to get nearer her, but she seemed to elude his approaches.

He knew she would not have summoned him

without having something grave to say, and saw that his surmises were correct by her method of receiving him. She was not in the drawing-room, but in Emery Bland's library, with a background of bindings of red and blue and green and gold, a few Brangwyn and Meryon etchings, and one brilliant, sinister spot of color by Félicien Rops. There was a fire in the monumental fireplace, and as he entered, a log was just breaking in the middle and spluttering, across the tall, richly wrought French dog-irons.

It was the room of the successful New-Yorker who delights in giving himself all the indulgences of taste of which his youth has been deprived. The girl, dressed simply in some light stuff, and scarcely *décolletée*, seemed somewhat lost in the spaciousness of her surroundings. She made no pretense at preliminary social small talk, going straight to her point. She did this by a repetition of the words with which she had opened the similar conversation at Mountain Brook. "I've something to tell you." Having said this while they were shaking hands, she went on as soon as they were seated in the firelight:

"At least Uncle Emery had something to tell you, and I asked him to let me do it."

"Why?" He put the question rather blankly.

"Because I thought I could do it better." But she caught herself up at once. "No; not better. Of course, I can't do that. Only—only I *wanted* him to let me do it."

Chip's heart bounded. Edith was in New York. She had heard of his condition. She was coming back to him. He was to have his reward for taking pity on Maggie Clare. His tongue and lips were parched as he forced out the words:

"Then it's good news—or you wouldn't want to break it?"

She was not visibly perturbed. Rather, she was pensive, sitting with an elbow resting on the arm of her chair, the hand raised so as to lay a forefinger on her cheek. "Don't you think that we often make news good or bad by our way of taking it?"

"That's asking me a question, when you've got information to give me. What have you to tell me, Miss Bland?"

"I've something to tell you that will give you

a great shock; so that I don't want to say it till I know you're prepared."

"Oh, prepared! Is one ever prepared? For God's sake, Miss Bland, what is it? Is one of the children hurt? Is one of them dead?"

"That would be a great grief. I said that this would be a great shock. There's a difference—and one *can* be prepared."

"Well, I am. Please don't keep me in suspense. Do tell me."

She sat now with hands folded in her lap, looking at him quietly. "No, you're not prepared."

"Tell me what to do and I'll do it," he said, nervously, "only don't torture me."

"One is prepared," she said, tranquilly, "by remembering beforehand one's own strength—by knowing that there's nothing one can't bear, and bear nobly."

"All right; all right; I'll do that. Now please go on."

"But *will* you?"

"Will I what?"

"Will you try to say to yourself: I'm a man, and I'm equal to this. It can't knock me down; it can't even stagger me. I'll take it in the

highest way. I sha'n't let it degrade me or send me for help to degrading things—"

He flung his hands outward. "Yes, yes. I know what you're driving at. I promise. Only, for God's sake, tell me. Is it about—?"

"It's about Mrs. Walker."

"Yes, so I supposed. But what is it? Is she ill? Oh, she isn't dead?"

The cry made her eyes smart, but she kept control of her voice.

"No, she's not dead. She's not even ill. She's perfectly well, so I understand. But she's been—" The horror in his face, the way in which he leaned forward as though he would spring at her, warned her that he knew what was coming. She gave him time to get himself in hand by rising and taking the two or three paces to the fireplace, where she stood with a hand on the mantel-board, which was above her head, while she gazed into the embers. "She's been—married."

She didn't turn round. She knew by all the subtle unnamed senses that he was huddled in his big arm-chair in a state of collapse. For the minute there was nothing to say or do. Since the iron had to enter into his soul, it was

better that it should be like this. It was better that it should be like this—with her there to keep him such company as one human being can keep for another at such an hour—better than if he were to learn it in the solitude of his own rooms, or in the unsustaining frigidity of a lawyer's office. She knew she didn't count for much, except for the fact—a detail only—that she was *with* him in every nerve that helped her to sensation and every faculty she possessed.

So, after the minutes had passed—ten, perhaps, or fifteen—instinct told her when to speak again. She did it without changing the position in which she stood, or turning for a glance toward him.

"You won't forget your promise?"

He spoke with the vacant, suffering tone of a sick child, or of a person so sunk into wretchedness as to find it hard to come up out of it. "What?"

She repeated the words. "You won't forget your promise?"

His tone was still vacant—vacant and afflicted. "What promise?"

"That you'd remember you're strong enough to bear it nobly."

"But I'm not."

She turned partly. He was bent over in a crushed, stupid attitude, his hands hanging limply between his knees. "Oh, Mr. Walker!"

He raised his forlorn eyes. "Why did you want to tell me?"

"Because I wanted to say *that*. I was afraid, if any one else did it, they'd leave it out."

He gazed at her long with a dull, unintelligent, unseeing expression. When he spoke he was like a man who tries to get his wits together after delirium or unconsciousness. "Do you think I am—strong enough?"

"I *know* you are."

He lumbered to his feet, staggering heavily to the chimney-piece, where he, too, laid his hands upon the mantel-board, which was just on a level with his height, bowing his forehead upon them. As he did so she moved away. Seeing his broad shoulders heave, and fearing she heard something smothered—was it a groan or a sob?—she slipped out of the room, closing the door behind her.

But when, some twenty minutes later, he himself came forth, his head bent, perhaps to hide his red eyes and his convulsed visage, he

found her at the door of the dining-room, with a cup of tea in her hand. "Drink this," she said, with gentle command.

He declined it with a shake of his head and an impatient wave of the hand.

"Yes, do," she insisted. "It's nice and hot. I'll have one, too."

Obediently he went into the dining-room. He drank the tea standing and in silence, in two or three gulps, while she, standing likewise, made a feint of pouring a cup for herself. He left without a good-night, beyond a hard, speechless wringing of her hand on his way to the door.

Two things seemed strange to Chip after that evening—the one, that the fight with Old Piper was ended; and the other, that in the matter of Edith's marriage, once the immediate shock had spent its strength, he bowed to the accomplished fact with a docility he himself could not understand. As for the fight with Old Piper, there was no longer a reason for waging it. In the new situation Old Piper had lost its appeal, from sheer inadequacy to meet the new need. The fact of the marriage he contrived to keep at a distance. He could do this the more easily because it was so mon-

strous. It was so monstrous that the mind refused to take it in, and he made no attempt to force himself. He asked neither whom she had married nor why she had married, nor anything else about her. It was a measure of safety. As long as he didn't know he was able to create a pretended fool's paradise of ignorance which, in his state of mind, was none the less a fool's paradise for being a pretense. Even a fool's paradise was a protection. If it hadn't been for the children, he might not have heard so much as the man's name.

The children called him "papa Lacon." Chip was obliged to swallow that. They spoke of him simply and spontaneously, taking "papa Lacon" as a matter of course. They varied the appellation now and then by calling him "our other papa."

It had been intimated to him, not long after the second marriage, that he might see the children with reasonable frequency, through the good offices of Mr. and Mrs. Bland. He soon saw that the arrangements were really in charge of Lily Bland, who brought the children to her house, and took them home again. Chip saw them in the library.

The first meeting was embarrassing. Tom was nearly eight, and Chippie on the way to six. They entered the library together, dressed alike in blouses and knickerbockers, their caps in their hands. They approached slowly to where he had taken up a position he tried to make nonchalant, standing on the hearth-rug with his hands behind him. He felt curiously culpable before them, like a convict being visited by his friends in jail. He felt childish, too, as though they were older than, and superior to, himself. The childishness was shown in his standing on his guard, determined not to be the first to make the advances. He wouldn't be even the first to speak.

They came forward slowly, with an air judicial and detached. Tom's eyes observed him more closely than his brother's, who looked about the room. Tom, as the elder, seemed to feel the responsibility of the meeting to be on his shoulders. He came to a halt, on reaching the end of the library table, Chippie by his side.

"Hello, papa."

"Hello, Tom."

Encouraged by this exchange of greetings, Chippie also spoke up. "Hello, papa."

"Hello, Chippie."

There followed a few seconds during which the interview threatened to hang fire there, when the protest in Chip's hot heart—which was essentially paternal—broke out almost angrily:

"Aren't you going to kiss me?"

It was Tom who pointed out the unreasonableness of emotion in making this demand. His brows went up in an expression of surprise, which hinted at protest on his own part. "Well, you're not sitting down."

Of course! It was obviously impossible for two little mites to kiss a man of that height at that distance. Chip dropped into an armchair, waiting jealously for the two dutiful little pecks that might pass as spontaneous, and then throwing his big arms about his young ones in a desperate embrace. After that the ice was broken, and, with the aid of the games and the picture-books provided by Lily Bland, the meeting could go forward to a glorious termination in ice-cream. Now and then there were difficult questions or observations, but they were never pressed unduly for reply.

"Papa, why don't you live with us any more?"

"Papa, shall we have another papa after this one?"

"Papa, our other papa has a funny nose."

"Papa, are you our real papa, or is papa Lacon?"

In general it was Chippie who put these questions or made the remarks. Tom seemed to understand already that the situation was delicate, and had moments of puzzled gravity.

But, taking one thing with another, the occasion passed off well, as did similar meetings through the rest of that winter and whenever they were possible—which was not often—in the summer that followed. It was a joy to Chip when they began again in the autumn, with a promise of regularity. But that joy, too, was short-lived.

It was his second time of seeing them after the general return to town. Tom was hanging on his shoulder, while Chippie was seated on his knee. Chippie was again the spokesman.

"We've got a baby sister at our house."

It seemed to Chip as if all the blood in his body rushed back to his heart and stayed there. He felt dizzy, sick. The walls of his fool's paradise were dissolved as mist, revealing a

picture he had seen twice already, each time with an upleaping of the primal and the fatherly in him; but now . . . Edith had been lying in bed, wan, bright-eyed, happy, with a little fuzzy head just peeping at her breast!

He put the boy from off his knee. Tom seemed to divine something and stole away. For a second or two both lads watched him —Chippie looking up straight into his face, Tom gazing from the distant line of the book-case, with his habitual expression of troubled perplexity. Chip managed to speak at last, getting out the words in a fairly natural tone.

"Look here, boys; I can't stay to-day. I've got a—I've got a pain. Just play by yourselves till Miss Bland comes for you. Be good boys, now, and don't touch any of Mr. Bland's things."

He was hurrying to the door when Chippie interrupted him. "Where have you got a pain, papa?"

He tapped himself on the heart. "Here, Chippie, here; and I hope you may never have anything so awful."

As he went down the steps he found himself saying: "Will this crucifixion never end? Have

I deserved it? Was the crime so terrible that I must be tortured by degrees like this?"

He was unable to answer his questions, or even to think. His mind seemed to go blank till as he tramped down the street he came again to the consciousness that he was speaking inwardly.

"Damn her! Damn her! She's nothing to me any more."

He was shocked, but he repeated the imprecation. He repeated it because it shocked him. It struck at what he held to be most sacred. It profaned his holy of holies, and left it bare to sacrilege. It gave him a fierce, perverted joy to feel that she whom he would have loved to shield with everything that was most tender was now exposed to his cursing. It was rifling his own sanctuary and trampling its treasures in the streets.

He had never had a sanctuary but in her. Other people's temples were to him not so much objects of contempt as of dim, vague astonishment. Such words as righteousness and sacrament and Saviour had no place in his speech. Edith had been the holiest thing he knew. She was both shrine and goddess.

Now that the shrine had been proven empty, and the goddess irrevocably flown, he got an impious satisfaction from battering down the altars and blaspheming the deity to whom they had been raised.

"Damn her! Damn her!"

He repeated the curse at intervals till he reached his rooms, the hateful rooms that he rarely visited at this hour of the day. He was not, however, thinking of their hatefulness now, as he had come with an intention.

There was a fire laid in the fireplace, and he lighted it. When it was crackling sufficiently he drew Edith's photograph from its frame and, after gazing at it long and bitterly, tossed it into the blaze. He watched it blister and writhe as though it had been a living thing. The flame seized on it slowly and unwillingly, biting at the edges in a curling wreath of blue, and eating its way inward only by degrees. But it ate its way. It ate its way till the whole lovely person disappeared—first the hands, and then the bosom, and then the throat and the features. The sweet eyes still gazed up at him when everything else was gone.

He had hoped to get relief by this bit of

ritual, but none came. When that which had been the semblance of his wife was no more than a little swollen rectangle of black ash, and the fire itself was dying down, he threw himself into a chair.

The reaction was not long in setting in. It set in with a voice that might have come from without, but which he nevertheless recognized as his own:

"You fool! Oh, you fool! What difference does this make to your love for her? You know you love her, and that you will never cease loving her, and that what you envy her is—the child."

What you envy her is—the child! He pondered on this. It was like an accusation. The admission of it—when admission came—was the point of departure in his heart of a new conscious yearning.

IV

DANGER

IT was what he had been afraid of on and off for seven years. The wonder was that it hadn't happened before. But, since it had not happened, he had got out of the way of expecting it. The fear of it used to dog him whenever he went to the theater or the opera or out to dine. There had been minutes in Fifth Avenue, or Bond Street, or the Rue de la Paix, as the case might be, when, at the sight of a feather or a scarf or something familiar in a way of walking, his heart and brain seemed to stop their function. He had known himself to stand stock-still, searching wildly for the easy, casual phrases he had prepared—for the purpose of carrying off such a meeting as this, if ever it occurred, only to find that he was mistaken—that it was some one else.

There had been two or three years like that, two or three years in which they had often

been in the same city, perhaps under the same roof; but he had never so much as caught a glimpse of her. In the earlier months that had been a relief. He couldn't have seen her and kept his self-control. He could follow the routine of life only by a system he had invented —a system for shutting her out of his thought, that the sight of her would have wrecked.

Then had come another period in which he felt he could have committed infamies just to see her getting in or out of a carriage, or lunching in a restaurant, or buying something in a shop. There were whole seasons when he knew she was in New York from autumn to spring; and, though he haunted all the places where women who keep in the movement are likely to be found, he never saw her.

He knew he could have discovered her plans and followed her; but he wouldn't do that. Besides, he didn't want to meet her in such a way as to be obliged to speak to her. He wouldn't have known what to say, or by what name to call her. Such an encounter would have annoyed her and made him grotesque. It was more than he asked. He would have been satisfied with a glimpse of her gloved hand

or her veiled face as she drove in the Park or the Avenue. But he never got it.

After he married, the fear of meeting her came back. It was fear as much for her sake as for his own. He began to understand that the embarrassment wouldn't be all on his side, nor the suffering. He picked that up from the children, as he had picked up so many things, piecing odds and ends of their speeches together. He saw them so rarely now that he attached the greater value to the hints they threw out. He never questioned them about her, but it was natural that they should take a wider range of comment in proportion as they grew older. So he learned that her dread of seeing him was as great as his own of seeing her. It was astonishing that in all those seven years the hazards of New York should not have thrown them together.

And now, at the moment when he might reasonably have felt safest, there she was! That is, she was on the steamer. For seven or eight days they were to be cooped up on the same boat. He could never go on deck or into the saloon without having to pass her. Worse still, she could never go outside her

cabin door without the risk of being obliged to make him some sign of recognition. And a sign of recognition between *them*—why, the thing was absurd! Between them it must be all—or nothing; and it couldn't be either.

He looked at the passenger-list again. Yes; that was her name: *Mrs. Theodore Lacon.* It was not a name likely to be duplicated. In all human probability it was she. As far as he could gather from the list, she was traveling alone, without so much as the companionship of a maid. He, too, was alone; but, fortunately, his name was inconspicuous: *Mr. C. Walker.* It was just the sort of name to be overlooked. She might read the list half a dozen times without really seeing it. If she were to notice it, she might easily not reflect that the initial stood for Chipman. It was conceivable that if she didn't actually see him she might not know that he was on the ship at all.

The thought suggested a line of action. He was in his cabin at the time. He could stay there. Looking through the port-hole, he saw that they had not yet passed the Statue of Liberty. While in dock he had kept to his

room, in order to read letters and avoid the crowd that throngs the deck of an outgoing steamer. There was every likelihood that she hadn't seen him any more than he had seen her. If he kept himself hidden she might never know! He could avoid the decks by day and take his exercise by night. By night, too, he could creep into the smoking-room and get a little change. But he would stay away from the general gathering-places on the ship and spare her what pain he could. That they should meet as strangers was out of the question. That they should meet as social acquaintances was even more so. They had been all to each other—and they had been nothing. No other relation was possible.

So the week passed, and they reached Liverpool. He was purposely among the last to go ashore. In the great shed where the luggage was distributed under initial letters, he was glad to remember that W was so far from . Nevertheless, he allowed his eye to roam toward section L, but found no one there whom he recognized. He ran over in his mind the various chances that she might not have come. It was no uncommon thing to read in a list of

passengers the names of people who hadn't sailed. He had done so before.

Later he scanned, as discreetly as he could, the occupants of the special train that was to take them to London. He couldn't see that she was anywhere among them. He sighed, but whether from relief or disappointment he was not sure.

As it was one o'clock, he took his seat in the luncheon-car, making sure in advance that she wasn't there. He had come to the conclusion by this time that she was not on the train at all—that she hadn't been on the steamer. He did not, however, regret his precautions, because—well, because the sense of her proximity had made him feel as he had felt in the days—fourteen years ago now—when the very streets of the city in which she lived were hallowed ground. He had supposed that emotion dead. Probably it was dead. It must be dead. It was merely that, owing to the constraint of the voyage, his nerves were unstrung, inducing the frame of mind in which people see ghosts. Yes, that was it; he had been seeing ghosts. It was not a living thing, this renewed yearning for a sight of her. It was only

the reflex of something past. It could be explained psychologically. It was the sort of evanescent sentiment inspired by old songs, or by the scent of faded flowers, reviving old joys tenderly, perhaps poignantly, but fleetingly, insubstantially, and only as the wraiths of what they were. Yes, that was it, he repeated to himself as he lunched. It was nothing to be afraid of, nothing incongruous with the fact that he had left a wife and child in New York. It was not an emotion; it was only the echo, the shadow, the memory of an emotion, gone before it could be seized.

And then, suddenly, they were face to face. He was on his way from the luncheon-car to the compartment he shared with two or three men at the other end of the train. She was standing in the corridor, looking out at the vaporous English landscape. Through the mists overlying the flat fields and distant parks trees loomed weirdly, the elms and beeches in full leaf, the oaks just tinged with green. Cottony white clouds drifted overhead; the sun was dimly visible. Now and then a line of hedge was white, or pink and white, with the bursting may.

He didn't recognize the lady who barred his way along the narrow passage. As she stood with one arm on the brass rail that crossed the window he could see an ungloved hand; but it might have been any hand. She wore a long brown coat, rather shapeless, reaching to the hem of her dress, while a large hat, about which a green veil looped and drooped irregularly, entirely concealing the head, helped to make her, as he stood waiting for her to move, a mere feminine figure without personality.

It was the sense that some one desired to pass that caused her to turn slightly, glancing up at him sidewise. Even so, he couldn't see all of her face—not much more than the forehead and the eyes. But the eyes seemed to come alive as he looked down into them, like sapphires under slowly growing light. When she turned, her movements had the deliberation of bewilderment. She might have been just wakened in a place she didn't know.

"Chip!" There was another half-minute of incredulous gazing before she said anything more. "What are you doing here?"

He felt the necessity of explaining his presence. "I was on the boat. I didn't know—"

"That I was on it, too?"

"I—I did know that," he stammered, "after we sailed. Not before. It was the name in the list—"

"But I never saw you. There weren't many passengers. I was always on deck."

Her distress betrayed itself in the trembling of her voice, in the shifting of her color, and in the beating of the ungloved hand upon the gloved one.

He felt his own confusion passing. It was so natural to be with her, so right. His voice grew steadier as he said:

"I didn't go about very much. I was afraid—"

She nodded, speaking hastily. "I understand. It was kind of you. And you're—alone?"

He cursed himself for coloring, but he couldn't help it. He had a wife and child in New York! He saw that she wanted to recognize that fact from the first. She wanted to put that boy and his mother between them. Her husband and child stood between them, too. He took that cue in answering.

"Yes; I've run over hurriedly on business. And are you alone, too?"

She glanced toward the empty compartment where her bags were stowed in the overhead racks, and her books and illustrated papers lay on the cushions. "I'm on my way to join my—" It was her turn to color.

He nodded quickly, to show that he understood.

"He's in Biarritz," she hurried on, for the sake of saying something. "I'm to meet him in Paris. I wasn't coming over at all this spring. I wanted to stay with the children at Towers—"

It was a safe subject. "How were the children when you left?"

"Tom was all right; but Chippie has been having the same old trouble with his tonsils. They'll have to be cut again."

"I thought so the last time I saw him. And he's growing too fast for his strength, poor little chap. I notice," he added, gazing at her more intently than he had as yet permitted himself to do, "that he begins to look like you."

She smiled for the first time. "Oh, but *I* think he looks like *you*."

"No; Tom takes after me. He's a Walker. Chippie's—"

"A darling," she broke in. "But he's not strong. Ever since he had the scarlet fever—"

"Yes, I know. But it might have been worse. We might have lost him. Do you remember the night—?"

She put her hand to her eyes as if to shut out the vision of it. "Oh, that awful night! And you were more afraid than I was. Mothers are braver than fathers at times like that."

"It was watching the fight he put up. Gad, he was plucky, the poor little chap! And he was only three, wasn't he?"

"Three and five months."

"And he'll be eleven his next birthday. How the years fly! By the way, won't it soon be time for Tom to be going to boarding-school?"

They were being pushed and jostled by guards and passengers. Between sentences it was necessary to make room for some one going or coming. She was obliged to step back into her compartment. Having taken the seat in the corner by the window, she motioned with her hand toward that in the opposite corner by the door. In this way they were separated by the length and width of the compartment,

the distance marking the other gulf between them.

She continued to talk of the children, looking at first into the cavernous obscurity of Crewe station, through which they were dashing, and then at the open country. The children, with their needs, their ailments, their future careers, could not but be the natural theme between them. It lasted while they passed Nuneaton, Rugby, and Stafford, and were well on their way to London. Suddenly he risked a question:

"Do they—understand?"

She was plainly agitated that he should disturb the ashes that buried their past. Her eyes shot him one piteous, appealing glance, after which they returned to the passing landscape. "Tom understands," she said, at last. "Chippie takes it for granted."

"Takes it for granted—how?"

"Just as they both did—till Tom began to get a little more experience. It seemed to them quite the ordinary thing to have"—she hesitated and colored—"to have two fathers."

He winced, but risked another question: "What makes you think that Tom's discovered it to be unusual?"

"Because he's said so."

"In what way? Do you mind telling me?"

"I'd rather *not* tell you."

"But if I insist?"

"You'll insist at the risk of having your feelings hurt."

"Oh, that!" A shrug of his shoulders and a wry smile expressed his indifference to such a result. "Did he ask you anything?"

She nodded, without turning from the window.

"Won't you tell me what it was? It would help me in my future dealing with the boy."

She continued to gaze out at the park-like fields, from which the mists had risen. "He asked me if you had done anything bad."

"And you told him—?"

"I told him that I didn't understand—that perhaps I'd never understood."

"Thank you for putting it like that. But you did understand, you know—perfectly. You mustn't have it on your conscience that—"

"Oh, we can't help the things we've got on our consciences. There's no way of shuffling away from them."

He allowed some minutes to pass before saying gently: "You're happy?"

She spoke while watching a flock of sheep trotting clumsily up a hillside from the noise of the train. "And you?"

"Oh, I'm as happy as—well, as I deserve to be. I'm not *un*happy." A pause gave emphasis to his question when he said, almost repeating her tone: "And you?"

"I suppose I ought to say the same." A dozen or twenty rooks alighting on an elm engaged her attention before she added: "I've no *right* to be unhappy."

"One can be unhappy without a right."

"Yes; but one forfeits sympathy."

"Do you need sympathy?"

She answered hurriedly: "No, not at all."

"I do."

His words were so low that it was permissible for her not to hear them. Perhaps she meant at first to make use of this privilege, but when a minute or more had gone by she said: "What for?"

"Partly for the penalties I've had to pay, but chiefly for deserving them."

It seemed to him that her profile grew pen-

sive. Though it detached itself clearly enough against the pane, it was a soft profile, a little blurred in the outline, with delicate curves of nose and lips and chin—the profile to go with dimpling smiles and a suffused sweetness. It pained him to notice that, though the suffused sweetness and the dimpling smiles were still as he remembered them, they didn't keep out of her face certain lines that had not been there when he saw her last.

"I think I ought to tell you," she said, after long reflection, "that I understand that sort of sympathy better now than I did some years ago. One grows more tolerant, if that's the right word, as one grows older."

"Does that mean that if certain things were to do again—you wouldn't do them?"

She took on an air of dignity. "That's something I can't talk about."

"But you think about it."

"Even so, I couldn't discuss it — with you."

"But I'm the very one with whom you *could* discuss it. Between us the conversation would be what lawyers call privileged."

She looked round at him for the first time

since entering the compartment. "Is anything privileged between you and me?"

"Isn't everything?"

"I don't see how."

"We've been man and wife—"

"That's the very reason. No two people seem to me so far apart as those who've been man and wife—and aren't so any longer."

"And yet, in a way, no two are so near together."

Her eyes were full of mute questioning. He made no attempt to approach her, but in leaning across the upholstered arm of his seat he seemed to overcome some of the distance between them.

"No two are so near together," he went on, "for the very reason that when they're separated outwardly they're bound the more closely by the things of the heart and the soul and the spirit. After all, those are the ties that count. The legal dissolving of bonds and making of new ones is only superficial. It hasn't put you and me asunder—not the you and me," he hurried on, as something in her expression and attitude seemed to indicate dissent, "not the you and me that are really essential. No court

and no judge could dissolve the union we entered into when you were twenty-one and I was twenty-seven, and our two lives melted into each other like the flowing together of two streams. Neither judge nor court can resolve into their original waters the rivers that have already become one."

She smiled faintly, perhaps bitterly. "Doesn't your figure of speech carry you too far? In our case the judge and the court were only incidental. What really dissolved our union was—"

"I know what you're going to say. And it *was* against the letter of the contract. Of course. I've never denied that, have I? But in every true marriage there's something over and above the letter of the contract—to which the letter of the contract is as nothing. And if ever there was a true marriage, Edith, ours was."

"Stop!" Her little figure became erect. Her eyes, which up to the present he had been comparing to forget-me-nots, as he used to do, now shone like blue-fired winter stars. "Stop, Chip."

"Why?"

"Because I ask you to."

"But why should you ask me to, when I'm only stating facts? It *is* a fact, isn't it? that our marriage was a true one in every sense in which a marriage *can* be true, till other people —no, let me go on!—till other people—your Aunt Emily most of all—advised you to exact your pound of flesh and the strict rigor of the law. I gave you your pound of flesh, Edith, right off the heart; so that if atonement could be made in that way—"

"Chip, *will* you tell me what good there is in bringing this up now? You're married to some one else, and so am I. We can't go back, because we've burned the bridges behind us—"

"But it's something to know that we'd go back if we could."

"I haven't said so."

"True."

He fell silent because of the impossibility of speech. He made no move to go. To sit with her in this way, without speaking, was like an obliteration of the last seven years, reducing them to a nightmare. It was a shock to him, therefore, when she pointed to a distant spire on a hill, saying:

"There's Harrow. We shall be in London in half an hour."

In London in half an hour, and this brief renewal of what never should have been interrupted would be ended! He recalled similar journeys with her over this very bit of line, when the arrival in London had been but the beginning of long delightful days together. And now he might not see her for another seven years; he might never see her any more. It was unnatural, incredible, impossible; and yet the facts precluded any rebellion on his part against them. Even if she were willing to rebel he couldn't do it—with a wife and boy in New York. He had married again on purpose to satisfy his longing for a child—a family. He felt very tenderly toward them, the little chap and his mother; but he was clear as to the fact that he felt tenderly toward them, pityingly tender, largely because when face to face with Edith he wished to God that they had never been part of his life. And doubtless she felt the same toward her Mr. Lacon and the child of that union. But she would never admit it—not directly, at any rate. He might gather it

from hints, or read it between the lines; but he could never make her say so. Why should she say so? What good would it do? Were she to confess to him that she hated the man toward whom she was traveling, he would experience an unholy satisfaction—but, after all, it would be unholy.

In the end he could find no simpler relief to his feelings than to take down her belongings from the overhead racks.

"I'll just run along and pick up my own traps," he explained, "and come back to see you properly looked after."

Though she assured him of her ability to look after herself, he felt at liberty to ridicule her pretensions. "You must have changed a great deal if you can do that," he declared, as he handed down a roll of rugs strapped with a shawl-strap.

"I have changed a great deal."

"I don't see it. I can't see that you've changed at all—essentially."

"Oh, but it's essentially that I *am* changed. Superficially I may be more or less the same—a little older; but within I'm another woman." She took advantage of the fact that his back

was turned to her, as he disentangled the handles of parasols and umbrellas from the network above, to say further: "Perhaps—since we've met in this unexpected way—and talked—possibly a little too frankly—it may be well if I remind you that you'd still be confronted with that fact—that I'm another woman—even if our bridges weren't burned behind us." He decided to let that pass without discussion, and because he said nothing she added: "And I dare say I should find you another man. So don't let us be too sorry, Chip, or think that if we hadn't done what we *have* done—"

Though he still stood with his back to her, lifting down a heavy bag with a black canvas covering, he could hear a catch in her voice that almost amounted to a sob. Because there was something in himself dangerously near responding to this appeal, he uttered the first words that came to him:

"Hello! Here's a thing I recognize. Didn't you have this—?"

As he stood holding the bag awkwardly before her she inclined her head.

"One of your wedding presents, wasn't it?"

"Oh, Chip, go away! I can't stand any more—*now*."
"Do you mean that you'll see me—later—when we're in London?"

She found voice to say: "It's my dressing-case. Mama gave it to me."

"And didn't I break a bottle in it once?"

She tried to catch his tone of casual reminiscence. "It's still broken."

"And isn't this the bag that got the awful bang that time we raised a row about it when we landed in New York? A silver box stove in, or something of that sort?"

She succeeded in smiling, though she knew the smile was ghastly. "It's still stove in."

"Gad, think of my remembering that!"

He meant the remark to be easy, if not precisely jocose; but the trivial, intimate details wrung a cry from her: "Oh, Chip, go away! I can't stand any more—*now*."

He pressed his advantage, standing over her, the black bag still in his hands, as she cowered in the corner, pulling down her veil. "'Now'! 'Now'! Do you mean that you'll see me—later—when we're in London?"

The veil hid her face, but she pressed her clasped hands against her lips as if to keep back all words.

"Do you mean that, Edith?" he insisted.

Her breath came in little sobs. She spoke

as if the words forced themselves out in spite of her efforts to repress them: "I'm—I'm staying at the Ritz. I shall be there for—for some days—till—till—he sends for me."

"Good. I'm at the Piccadilly. I shall come to-morrow at eleven."

Before she could withdraw her implied permission he was in the corridor on the way to his own compartment; but at Euston he was beside her door, ready to help her down. Amid the noise and bustle of finding her luggage and having it put on a taxi-cab, there was no opportunity for her to speak. He took care, besides, that there should be none. She was actually seated in the vehicle before she was able to say to him, as he stood at the open window to ask if she had everything she required:

"Oh, Chip, about to-morrow—"

"At eleven," he said, hastily. "I make it eleven because if it's fine we might run down and have the day at Maidenhead."

She caught at a straw. If she couldn't shelve him, a day in the country, in the open air, would be less dangerous than one in London. And perhaps in the end she might shelve him. At

any rate, she could temporize. "I've never been at Maidenhead."

"And lunch at Skindle's isn't at all bad."

"I've never been at Skindle's."

"And after lunch we'll go out on the river—the Clieveden woods, you know—and all that."

"I've never seen the Clieveden woods."

"Then that's settled. At eleven. All right, driver; go on."

But she stretched her hands toward him. "Oh, Chip, don't come! I'm afraid. What's the good? Since we've burned our bridges—"

He had just time to say: "Even without bridges, there are wings. At eleven, then. All right, driver; go on. The Ritz Hotel."

V

PENALTY

HE went to Berne because she had let slip the name of that place during the afternoon at Maidenhead. It was the only hint of the kind she threw out during the afternoons—four in all—they passed together. He forgot the connection in which they came, but he retained the words: "He may have to go to Berne."

He was between them as an awesome presence, never mentioned otherwise than allusively. His name was too sinister to speak. Each thought of him unceasingly, in silence, and with anguish; but, as far as possible, they kept him out of their intercourse. It was enough to know that he was there, a fearful authority in the background, able to summon her from this brief renewal of old happiness, as Pluto could recall Eurydice.

It was the supremacy of this power, which

they themselves had placed in his hands, that in the end drove Chip Walker to wondering what he was like.

"What *is* he like?" he found the force to ask.

She looked distressed. "He's a good man."

He nerved himself to come to a point at which he had long been aiming: "Look here, Edith! Why did you marry him?"

"Do you mean, why did I marry him in particular, or why did I marry any one?"

"I mean both."

"Oh, I don't know. There—there seemed to be reasons."

That was at Tunbridge Wells—in the twilight, on the terrace of the old Calverly Hotel. They were sitting under a great hawthorn in full bloom. The air was sweet with the scent of it. It was sweet, too, with the scent of flowers and of new-mown hay. In a tree at the edge of the terrace a blackbird was singing to a faint crescent moon. There was still enough daylight to show the shadows deepening toward Eridge and over Broadwater Down, while on the sloping crest of Bishop's Down Common human figures appeared of gigantic size as they towered through the gloaming.

Edith was pouring the after-dinner coffee. It was the first time they had dined together. On the other days she had made it a point to be back in London before nightfall; but she had so far yielded to him now as to be willing to wait for a later train.

"What sort of reasons?" he urged.

"Oh, I don't know," she said again, pensively, dropping a lump of sugar into his coffee-cup. She added, while passing the cup to him: "It isn't so easy for a woman to be—to be drifting about—especially with two children."

"But why should you have drifted about, when you knew that at a sign from you—?"

She went on as if he hadn't spoken. "And when I saw you had dismantled the house and other people were living in it—I couldn't help seeing that, you know, in driving by—"

"But, good God, Edith, you wouldn't have come back to me?"

She stirred her own coffee slowly. "N-no."

"Does that mean no or yes?"

"Oh, it means no. That is"—she reflected long—"if I *had* gone back to you I should have been sorry."

"You would have considered it a weakness —a surrender—"

She nodded. "Something like that."

"And you really had stopped—caring anything about me?"

"It wasn't that so much as—so much as that I couldn't get over my resentment." She seemed to have found the explanatory word. "That was it," she continued, with more decision. "That's what I felt: resentment—a terrible resentment. Whatever compromise I thought of, that resentment against you for—for doing what you did—blocked the way. If I'd gone back I should have taken it with me."

"But you don't seem to suffer from it now. Or am I wrong?"

She answered promptly: "No; you're right. That's the strange part of it. After I married —it left me. It was as if old scores were wiped out. That isn't precisely what I felt," she hastened to add; "and yet, it was something *like* that."

"You'd got even."

She shook her head doubtfully. "N-no. I don't mean that. But the past seemed to be dissolved—not to exist for me any more."

"H'm! Not to exist for you any more!"

"I said *seemed*. That's what bewildered me —from the beginning: things I thought I felt —or thought I didn't feel—for a while—only to find later that it wasn't—wasn't *so*." She went on with difficulty. "For instance—that day—that day at the Park—I thought that everything was killed within me. But it wasn't. It came alive again."

"But not so much alive that you wanted to come back to me."

"Alive—in a different way."

"What sort of different way?"

Her eyes became appealing. "Oh, what's the good of talking of it now?"

"Because you haven't told me what I asked —why you married him—why you married any one."

She turned the query against himself: "Why did *you*?"

"I didn't till after you did. I wouldn't have done it then if—if I hadn't been so—well, to put it plainly, so damned lonely."

She gave him one of the smiles that stabbed him. "Well, then? Doesn't that answer your question?"

He thought it did, and for a while they listened to the blackbird's song in silence. It was their last talk. They parted at the door of the Ritz with the intention of spending the next day in Windsor Forest—or some other romantic wood; but within a few minutes she had telephoned him that the summons had arrived. Next morning she left for Paris.

And so he went to Berne. He hadn't meant to go there when he said good-by to her at Victoria. He had no intention of following her or putting himself in her way. He had purposely asked nothing of her plans, or so much as the date of her return to America. He had not precisely made up his mind that they were parting for good, but he was too stunned to forecast the future. He was stunned and sickened. He was stunned and sickened and disconsolate to a degree beyond anything he had thought possible in life. If it hadn't been for the bit of business that had brought him to London he would hardly have had courage enough to get through the days.

But, the business coming to an end, he was stranded. There was nothing to do but go back to the wife and child whose existence

he never remembered except with a pang of self-reproach. He meant to go back to them —but not yet. It was too soon. Edith was too much with him. The fact that her physical presence was withdrawn made her spiritually the more pervasive. The afterglow of their days together couldn't fade otherwise than slowly, like light when the sun goes down.

So, when he should have been going to New York, he went to Berne. It was not really in the hope of being face to face with her again or of having speech with her. Even if she came there the dread presence would come with her and keep them apart. But Berne was a little place, a quiet place, restful, soothing, a haunt of ancient peace. It had struck him, on former visits there, that on this spot ignored by the tourist, who changes trains subterraneously, consecrated to old sturdiness and modern wisdom, serenely heedless of the blatant and the up-to-date, a bruised spirit might heal itself in a seclusion cheered by green hills and distant snowy ranges. It was such solitude that, in the first place, he sought now. If in addition he could see the shadow of Edith passing

by—no more!—he felt that he would soon be inwardly strong again.

At Berne there is a hotel known chiefly to wise travelers—a hotel of old wines, old silver, old traditions, handed down from father to son, and from the son to the son's son. Standing on the edge of the bluff which the city crowns, it dominates from its windows and terraces the valley of the Aar. Swift and unruffled, the river glides through the meadows like a sinuous ice-green serpent. Beyond the river and behind the pastoral slopes of the Gurten hangs a curtain of mist, which lifts at times to display the line of the Bernese Oberland, from the Wetterhorn to the Bettfluh.

It is a hotel with which the learned people who sit in international conferences and settle difficult questions are familiar. It was sheltering a conference when Chip Walker arrived. Each of the nations had appointed three distinguished men to consult with three distinguished men from each of the other nations on possible modifications in the rules of the Postal Union when the use of aeroplanes became general in that service. The distinguished men met officially in a great room of the Bun-

despalast; but unofficially they could be seen strolling along the arcaded medieval streets, or feeding the civic bears with carrots at the bear-pit, or reading or smoking or sipping coffee and liqueurs in the fine semicircular hall of the hotel. They were French, or Austrian, or Russian, or German, or English, or Danish, or Dutch, as the case might be. There were also some Americans. The great national types were more or less easy to discern—except the Americans. That is, Chip Walker could see no one whom he could recognize offhand as a fellow-countryman. Three gentlemanly, jovial Englishmen were easily made out, because, in Walker's phrase, they "flocked by themselves" and in the intervals of sitting in the Bundespalast complained that Berne had no golf-links. They also dressed for dinner and dined in the restaurant. A few others did the same. But the majority of the distinguished men preferred to spend the evening in the costumes they had worn all day, and, with their wives—there were eight or ten dumpy, dowdy, smiling little wives —were content with the *table d'hôte*. Indeed, the popularity of the *table d'hôte* sifted the simple, scholarly professors of Göttingen, Frei-

burg, or Geneva from the representatives of the larger and more sophisticated social world, leaving the latter to eat in the restaurant, *à la carte*.

In this way Chip came to observe a man of some distinction who took his meals at a small table alone and kept to himself. He was a man who would have been noticeable anywhere, if it were for no more than the dignified gravity of his manner and the correctness of his dress. Not only did he wear what was impeccably the right thing for the right occasion, but his movements were of the sedate precision that never displaces a button. As straight and slim and erect as a guardsman, he was nevertheless stamped all over as a civilian. From the lines in his gray, clean-shaven face of regular profile, and the silvery touches in his hair, Chip judged him to be fifty years old. He puzzled the analyst of nationalities—though, as Chip put it to himself, it was clear he must belong to one of the peoples who were chic. He was, therefore, either English or French or Russian or Austrian or American. There was a bare chance of his being a Dane or a Swede. When he spoke to a waiter or a passing acquaintance,

it was in so low a tone that Walker couldn't detect the language he used. All one could affirm from distant and superficial observation was that he was Somebody—Somebody of position, experience, and judgment—Somebody to respect.

That, perhaps, was the secret of Walker's curiosity—that he respected him. He would have liked to talk to him—not precisely to ask his advice, but to lay before him some of the difficulties that were inchoate in his soul. He had an idea that this man with the grave, suffering face—yes, there was suffering in his face, as one could see on closer inspection!—would understand them.

He came to the conclusion that he was a Russian, though he had an early opportunity to find out. As he stood one day by the concierge's desk the stranger entered, paused, spoke a few words inaudible to Walker, and passed on. It was a simple matter to ask his name of the one man who knew every name in the hotel, and he was on the point of doing so. He had already begun: "*Voulez vous bien me dire—?*" when he stopped. On the whole he preferred his own speculations. In the long, idle hours

they gave him something to think of that took his mind from dwelling on his own entangled affairs.

He counted, too, on the hazards of hotel life throwing them one day together. He was already on speaking or nodding terms with most of the distinguished men whom he could address in a common language. This had come about by the simple means of propinquity on the terrace or in the semicircular hall. He soon saw, however, that no diligence in frequenting these places of reunion would help him with the stately stranger whose interest he desired to win. The gentleman took the air elsewhere.

For contiguous to the terrace of the hotel is a little public park called the Kleine Schanze—haunt of well-behaved Bernese children, of motherly Bernese housewives supplied with knitting and the gossip of the town, of Bernese patriarchs in search of gentle exercise and sunshine. This little park possesses a music-pavilion, a duck-pond, a monument to the Postal Union of 1876, many pretty pathways, and an incomparable promenade. The incomparable promenade has also an incomparable view on

those days when the Spirit of the Alps permits it to be visible.

Two such days at least there were during that month of June. Glancing casually over his left shoulder as he marched one afternoon with head bent and back turned toward the east, Chip saw that which a few minutes before had been but the misty edge of the sky transformed into a range of ineffable white peaks. The unexpectedness with which the glistering spectacle appeared made his heart leap. It was like a celestial vision—like a view of the ramparts of the Heavenly City. He clutched the stone top of the balustrade beside which he stood, seeking terms with which to make the moment indelible in his memory. Nothing came to him but a few broken, obvious words—sublime!—inviolate!—eternal! and such like.

What he chiefly felt was his inadequacy for even gazing on the sight, much less for recording it, when he became aware that in the crowding of people to the edge of the terrace the stranger was standing near him. It was an opportunity not to be missed.

"*Ça, c'est merveilleux, n'est-ce pas, monsieur?*"

The words were banal, but they would serve to break the ice.

"Yes; and it becomes more marvelous the oftener it appears. I've never seen it more beautiful than to-day; but perhaps that's because I've seen it so many times."

Chip was disappointed to be answered in English, and especially in the English of an American. It brought the man too near for confidence. They might easily find themselves involved in a host of common acquaintances, a fact that would preclude intimate talk. Had he been a Russian the remoteness of each from the other's world would have made the exchange of secrets—perhaps of secret griefs—a possibility. Not so with a man whom one might meet the next time one entered a club in New York. Such a man might even be. . . . But he dismissed that alarming thought as out of the question. Edith wasn't at Berne. If she had been he would have seen her. He would not inquire at the hotel, nor at any other hotel; but he knew that in so small a town he must have had a glimpse of her somewhere. While it was conceivable that her husband might have come to Berne leaving her elsewhere, this was not the

sort of man she would have married. The type to appeal to her would be something like his own—of course!

Nevertheless, as he had begun the conversation, he felt that in courtesy he must go on with it. He did so by pointing with his stick to what he took to be the highest summit of the range, and saying: "I suppose that's the Jungfrau."

The stranger moved nearer him. "No, you're too far to the west. That's the Breithorn. There's the Jungfrau"—he, too, pointed with his stick—"sentineled by the Eiger and the Mönch."

He went on to indicate the Wetterhorn, the Schreckhorn, the Blumlisalp, the Finsteraarhorn, and the Ebnefluh. They were like a row of shining spiritual presences manifesting themselves to an unbelieving world.

For the moment they served their turn in helping Chip Walker to subjects of conversation with his fellow-countryman, in whom he had lost some interest because he was a fellow-countryman.

"You know a lot about Switzerland, don't you?" he observed, as the stranger, still point-

ing with his stick and naming names—the Silberhorn, the Gletschhorn, the Schneehorn, the Niesen, the Bettfluh—that impressed the imagination with the force of the great white peaks themselves, resolved the panorama into its minor elements.

The stick came down and the explanation ceased. "I've lived a good deal abroad," was the response, given quietly. "You, too, haven't you?"

With the question they turned for the first time and looked each other in the eyes. While Chip explained that he had spent his early years in France or Italy or England, according to the interests of his parents, he was inwardly remarking that the gray face, with its stiff lines, its compressed lips, its unmoving expression, and its stamp of suffering, was really sympathetic. Something in the composure of the manner and the measured way of speaking imposed this new acquaintance on him as a superior. Instinctively he said "sir" to him, as to an elder, though the difference in their ages could not have been more than seven or eight years. It flattered him somewhat, too, that the man who kept aloof from others should make an ex-

ception of him and welcome his advances. They parted with the tacit understanding that for the future, in the routine of the hotel, they should be on speaking terms.

There was, however, no further meeting between them till after dinner on the following evening. Turning from the purchase of stamps at the concierge's desk, Chip saw his new acquaintance, wearing an Inverness cloak over his dinner-jacket, and a soft felt hat, lighting a cigar. There was an exchange of nods. On the older man's lips there was a ghost of a smile. It seemed friendly. He spoke:

"You don't want to smoke a cigar in the little park? It's rather pleasant there, with a full moon like this."

So it was that within a few minutes they found themselves seated side by side on one of the benches of the terraced promenade where they had met on the previous day. Though the row of shining spiritual presences had withdrawn, the valley was spanned by a velvety luminosity, through which the lights of the lower town shone like stars reflected in water. The talk was of the conference. The stranger spoke of himself:

"I've been interested in the various methods of international communication for many years. In fact, I've made some slight study of them. When the authorities were good enough to appoint me on this commission I was glad to serve."

"Quite so," Chip murmured, politely.

"It's an attractive little town, too—one of the few capitals in Europe that remain characteristic of their countries, and nothing else—wholly or nearly unaffected by the current of life outside. But," he went on, unexpectedly, "I wonder what a man like you can see in it—to remain here so long?"

Chip was startled, but he managed to say: "It isn't that I see anything in particular. I'm—"

"Waiting?"

The query was perfectly courteous. It implied no more than a casual curiosity—hardly that.

"No; resting," Chip answered, with forced firmness.

"Ah, it's certainly a good place for resting." Then, after a pause: "You're married, I think you said."

Chip didn't remember having said so, and replied to that effect. The stranger was unperturbed.

"No? But you are?" By way of pressing the question, he added, with a glance at Chip through the moonlight: "Aren't you?"

"I've a wife and little boy in New York," Walker answered, soberly.

"Ah!" There was no emphasis on this exclamation. It signified merely that a certain point in their mutual understanding had been reached. "A happy marriage must be a great —safeguard."

The tone was of a man making a moral reflection calmly, but Chip was startled again. It was his turn to stare through the moonlight, where the length of the bench lay between them. He felt that he was being challenged, but that he must not betray himself too soon. "Safeguard against what, sir?"

There was a faint laugh, or what might have been a laugh had there been amusement in it. "Against everything from which a married man needs protection."

Chip would have dropped the subject but for that sense that a challenge was being thrown

him before which he could not back down. Nevertheless, he determined to keep from committing himself as long as possible. "I'm not sure that I know what you mean."

The stranger seemed to examine the burning end of his cigar. "Oh, nothing but the obvious things—pursuing another man's wife, for instance. A man who's happily married doesn't do that."

There was no aggression in the tone, and yet Chip felt a curious chill. Who was this man, and what the devil was he driving at? It was all he could do to answer coolly, knocking the ash off the end of his own cigar: "And yet, I've known of such cases."

"Oh, so have I. But there was always a screw loose somewhere—I mean, a screw loose in what we're assuming to be the happy marriages."

"Are there any happy marriages?—permanently happy, that is?"

The response was surprisingly direct: "That's what I hoped you'd be able to tell *me*."

"Then you don't know, sir?"

Again the response was surprisingly direct: "I don't know, because I'm not happily mar-

ried." A second later he added: "But other people may be."

So they were going to exchange secrets, after all. "But you *are* married, sir?" To clear the air, he felt himself obliged to add: "Happily or unhappily."

"I married a lady who had divorced her husband." In the silence that followed it seemed to Chip that he could hear the murmur of the almost soundless river below. Somehow the sound of the river was all he could think of. Quietly moving, low-voiced couples paced up and down the promenade, and from the music-pavilion in the distance came the whine and shiver of the Mattiche. "In divorce," the measured voice resumed, "there are some dangerous risks. It's a dangerous risk for a man to divorce his wife. It's a more dangerous risk for a woman to divorce her husband. But to marry a divorced husband or a divorced wife is the most dangerous risk of all."

Chip's voice was thick and dry. "May I ask, sir, on what you base your—your opinion?"

"Chiefly on the principle that, no matter how successfully the dead are buried, they may

come back again as ghosts. No one can keep them from doing that."

"And—and I presume, sir, that you held this theory when you married?"

"I held it *as* a theory; I didn't know it as a fact."

Chip felt obliged to struggle onward. "And do I understand you to be telling me now that the ghosts *have* come back?"

"Perhaps you could as easily tell me."

It was a minute or more before Chip was able to say, in a voice he tried to keep firm: "If they have come back, you're not more haunted by them than—than any one else."

"So I understand."

The brief responses had the effect of dragging him forward. "And would it be fair to ask why you say that?—that you understand?"

"Oh, quite fair. It's partly because you are here."

"Then you think I ought to go away?"

"I think—since you ask me—that you oughtn't to have come."

"I came—to rest."

"I don't question that. I'm only struck by —by the long arm of coincidence."

"That is, you believe I had another motive?"

With a gesture he seemed to wave this aside. "That's hardly my affair. You're here; and, since you are, I'd rather—"

"Yes?"

"I'd rather you didn't hurry away."

He rose on saying this, apparently with the intention of going back to the hotel. Chip remained seated. He smoked mechanically, without knowing what he did. Questions rose to his lips and died there. Was Edith in Berne? Had she seen him? Was she keeping out of his way? Was she being kept out of his way? Was she suffering? Was it through her that he had been recognized? The fact that he *had* been recognized brought with it a kind of humiliation. The humiliation was the greater because of the way in which he had singled out this man and approached him. During all those days of studying the stranger with respectful discretion, seeking an opportunity to address him, the stranger, without deigning him a look, had known perfectly well who he was and had been imputing motives to his presence. The reference to the long arm of coincidence

was stinging. Because it was so he tried to muster his dignity.

"I've no intention of hurrying away," he began; "but—"

"If you like, I'll put it this way," the measured voice broke in, courteously. "If you have time to wait a little longer I should be glad if you'd do it."

"Would there be any point to that?"

"I think you might trust me not to make the request if there were not." He added presently: "It's a wise policy to let sleeping dogs lie; but when they've once been roused, they've got to be quieted."

"Quieted—how?"

"I can't tell you that as yet. I may have some vague idea concerning the process; I've none at all as to the result."

Chip was not sure that the stranger said good night. He knew he lifted his hat and moved away. He watched him as, with stately, unhastening step, he walked down the promenade, the Inverness cape and soft felt hat silhouetted in the moonlight.

For the next forty-eight hours Walker hung about the hotel like a culprit. He would have

sacrificed even a glimpse of Edith to feel free to go away. He couldn't go away while the other man's plans remained enigmatical; but he wished he hadn't come. He felt his position undignified, grotesque, like that of a boy detected in some bit of silly daring.

Two days later they met again on the terrace of the Kleine Schanze. It was not an accidental meeting. The stranger had walked directly up to Chip to say:

"The lady to whom we were referring the other night—"

But Chip was still on his guard. "Did I refer to a lady?"

"Perhaps not. But I did. And that lady is ill. You may be interested to know it. She was ill when she arrived in Paris from London ten days ago."

"Then she's here."

"She's here. That's why I'm taking your time in asking you to remain."

Chip forced the next question with some difficulty: "Does she—does she want to—to see me?"

"She hasn't said so."

"Has she—said anything about me at all?"

"That, I think, I must leave you to learn later. But I should like you to know at once that I'm not keeping you here without a motive."

The stately figure moved on, leaving Chip to guess blindly at the possibilities in store.

More days passed—nearly a week. Chip spent much of his time in the Kleine Schanze, noticing that the distinguished stranger frequented it less. Idleness would have got on his nerves, and Berne begun to bore him, had it not been for the knowledge that he was under the same roof with Edith. That gave him patience. It was the kind of comfort a man or a woman finds in being near the prison where some loved one is shut up in a cell.

It was again an afternoon when the shining spiritual presences were making themselves visible—not with the gleaming suddenness with which they had appeared ten days before, but slowly, with vague wonders, as if finding it hard to bring themselves within mortal ken. Rounding the corner of the promenade at the end remote from the hotel, at a point from which he had the whole line of the bluff and the green depths of the valley and the slopes of the Gur-

ten and the curtain of Alpine mist in one superb *coup d'œil*, Chip saw a great white shoulder baring itself luminously in the eastern sky. For long minutes that was all. It might have been one of the gates of pearl of which he had heard tell.

It was the sort of thing from which no earth-dweller could take his eyes. He stood leaning on his stick, his cigar smoldering in his left hand. He couldn't see that the clouds lifted or that the mists rolled away, he only grew aware that what seemed like a gate became a bastion, and what seemed like a bastion rose into a tower, and that out of the tower and in the midst of the tower and round about the tower white pinnacles glistened in white air. Nothing had happened that he could define, beyond a heightening of his own capacity to see. Nothing on that horizon seemed to emerge or to recede: looking wrought the wonder; he either saw or he didn't see; and just now he saw. He thought of something he had heard or read—he had forgotten where: "Immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales." That, apparently, was the process, while the spiritual presences ranged themselves slowly

within his vision—row upon row, peak upon peak, dome upon dome, serried, ghostly—white against a white sky, white in white air.

He withdrew his gaze only because the people, ever eager for this spectacle which they had seen all their lives, crowded to the parapet. As the children were still in school, it was a quiet throng, elderly and sedate. Leaning on the balustrade, all faces turned one way, they fringed the promenade, leaving the broad, paved spaces empty.

For this reason Chip's eye caught the more quickly at the other end of the terrace the figures of a man and a woman who stood back from the line of gazers. They were almost in profile toward himself, the man's erect, stately form allowing the fact that a woman was clinging to his arm to be just perceptible. It required no such movement as that of a few minutes later—a movement by which the woman came more fully into view—for Chip to recognize Edith.

His Edith, *his wife*, clinging to another man's arm, clinging to her husband's arm, clinging to the arm of a husband who was not himself, dependent on him, supported by him, possessed

by him, coming and going with him, living and eating with him, bearing him children, sharing with him whatever was most intimate, directed by him and dominated by him!—yet, all the while, in everything that could make two beings one except that stroke of the pen called law, *his wife!*

How had it come about? What had he done, what had she done, to make this hideous topsyturvydom a fact? He put his hand to his forehead like a man dazed; but he withdrew it quickly. His forehead was wet and clammy. He was shaken, transpierced. He saw now that, in all the three years since he had heard she was married, he hadn't really known it. Perhaps it was his imagination that was at fault—perhaps his incapacity for believing what wasn't under his very eyes—perhaps his own success in keeping the dreadful fact at a distance—*but he hadn't really known it.* Nothing could have brought it home to him like this—this glimpse of her intimate association with the other man, and her dependence upon him.

His first impulse was to get out of their sight, to hide, to find some place where he could

grasp the appalling fact in silence and seclusion. Second thoughts reminded him that there was a situation to be faced and that he might as well face it now as at any other time. What sort of situation it would be he couldn't guess; but he was sure that behind the immobile mask of the other man's grave face there was something that would be worth the penetration. He would give him a chance. He would go forward to meet them. No, he wouldn't go forward to meet them; he would wait for them where he stood. No, he wouldn't wait for them where he stood; he would slip into the little rotunda close beside him—a little rotunda generally occupied by motherly Bernese women, but which for the moment the commanding spectacle outside had emptied.

It was a little open rotunda, with seats all round and a rude table in the middle. In sitting down he placed himself as nearly as possible in full view, but with his face toward the mountains. It gave him a preoccupied air to be seen relighting his cigar. It was thus optional with the couple who began to advance along the promenade to pass him by or to pause and address him.

Nothing but a shadow warned him of their approach.

"Chip—"

He turned. Edith was standing in the doorway, the man behind her. The haggard pallor of her face and the feverishness of her eyes reminded Chip of the morning little Tom was born. He was on his feet—silent. He couldn't even breathe her name. It was the less necessary since she herself hastened to speak:

"Chip, Mr. Lacon knows we met in England. I told him as soon as I reached Paris; I didn't want him not to know. And now he wants us all to meet—I don't know why."

Since he had to say something, he uttered the first words that came to him: "Was there any harm in it—our meeting? Mr. Lacon knows we have children—and things to talk over."

"Oh, it isn't only that," she said, excitedly. "It's more. I don't know what—but I know it's more."

He looked puzzled. "More in what way?"

"More in this way," said the measured voice, that had lost no shade of its self-control. "I understand that Edith feels she has made a mistake—that you've both made a mistake—"

Edith was standing in the doorway, the man behind her. "Chip, Mr. Lacon knows we met in England."

behind
gland."

"I never said so," she interrupted, hurriedly.

Lacon smiled, as nearly as his saddened face could smile. "I didn't say you said so," he corrected, gently. "I said I understood. There's a difference. And, since I do understand, I feel it right to offer you—to offer you both—"

Exhaustion compelled her to drop into a seat. "What are you going to say?"

"Nothing that can hurt you, I hope—or—or Mr. Walker, either. Suppose we all sit down?"

He followed his own suggestion with a dignity almost serene. Chip took mechanically the seat from which he had just risen. It offered him the resource of looking more directly at the range of glistening peaks than at either of his two companions.

"The point for our consideration is this," Lacon resumed, as calmly as if he were taking part in a meeting at the Bundespalast. "Admitting that you've both made a mistake, is there any possibility of retracing your steps?—or must you go on paying the penalty?"

Chip spoke without turning his eyes from the mountains: "What do you mean by—the penalty?"

"I suppose I mean the necessity of making four people unhappy instead of two."

"That is," Chip went on, "there are two who must be unhappy in any case."

"Precisely. There are two for whom there's *no* escape. Whatever happens now, nothing can save *them*. But, since that is so, the question arises whether it wouldn't be, let us say, a greater economy of human material if the other two—"

Edith looked mystified. "I don't know what you mean. Which are the two who must be unhappy in any case?"

Chip answered quietly, without turning his head: "He's one; my—my wife is the other."

"Oh!" With something between a sigh and a gasp she fell back against a pillar of the rotunda.

"It's the sort of economy of human material," Chip went on, his eye following the lines of the Wetterhorn up and down, "that a man achieves in saving himself from a sinking ship and leaving his wife and children to drown —assuming that he can't rescue them."

"The comparison isn't quite exact," Lacon replied, courteously. "Wouldn't it rather be

that if a man can save only one of two women, he nevertheless does what he can?"

Edith still looked bewildered. "I don't know what you're talking about, either of you. What is it? Why are we here? Am I one of the two women to be saved?"

"The suggestion is," Chip said, dryly, "that Mr. Lacon wouldn't oppose your divorcing him, while my—my present wife might divorce me; after which you and I could marry again. Isn't that it, sir?"

The older man nodded assent. "It's well to use plain English when we can."

Chip continued to measure the Wetterhorn with his eye. "Rather comic the whole thing would be, wouldn't it?"

"Possibly," Lacon replied, imperturbably. "But we've accepted the comic in the institution of marriage, we Americans. It's too late for us to attempt to take it without its possibilities of opera bouffe."

"But aren't there laws?" Edith asked.

Again Lacon's lips glimmered with the ghost of a smile. "Yes; but they're very complacent laws. They reduce marriage to the legal permission for two persons to live together as man

and wife as long as mutually agreeable; but the license is easily rescinded—and renewed."

"But surely marriage is more than that," she protested.

Lacon's ghost of a smile persisted. "Haven't we proved that it isn't?—for us, at any rate. Hesitation to use our freedom in the future would only stultify our action in the past. If we go in for an institution with qualities of opera bouffe isn't it well to do it light-heartedly?—or as light-heartedly as we can."

Edith looked at him reproachfully. "Should you be doing it light-heartedly?"

"I said as light-heartedly as we can."

"What makes you think that Chip and I—I mean," she corrected, with some confusion, "Mr. Walker and I—want to do it at all?"

"Isn't that rather evident?"

"I didn't know it was."

Chip glanced at them over his shoulder. It seemed to him that Lacon's look was one of pity.

"You met in England," the latter said, displaying a hesitation unusual in him, "with something—something more than pleasure, as I judge; and—and Mr. Walker is here."

"Yes, by accident," she declared, hurriedly. "It was by accident in England, too."

He lifted his fine white hand in protest. "Oh, I'm not blaming you. On the contrary, nothing could be more natural than that you should both feel as I—I imagine you do. You're the wife of his youth—he's the husband of yours. The best things you've ever had in your two lives are those you've had in common. That you should want to bridge over the past, and, if possible, go back—"

"We've burned our bridges," she interrupted, quickly.

"Even burned bridges can be rebuilt if there's the will to do it. The whole question turns on the will. If you have that I want you to understand that I shall not be—be an obstacle to the—to the reconstruction."

"Don't you *care*?"

"That's not the question. We've already assumed the fact that my caring—as well as that of a certain other person whom Mr. Walker would have to consider—is secondary. It's too late to do anything for us—assuming that she understands, or may come to understand, the position as I do. Your refusing happiness for

yourselves in order to stand by us, or even to stand by the children—the younger children, I mean—wouldn't do us any good. On the contrary, as far as I'm concerned, if there could be any such thing as mitigation—"

He broke off. Seeing the immobile features swept as by convulsion, Chip took up the sentence: "It would be that Edith should feel free."

"Precisely."

"And her not feeling free would involve the continuance of—the penalty."

"In its extreme form." He regained control of himself. "That the penalty should be abrogated altogether is out of the question. Some of us must go on paying it—all four of us, indeed, to some degree. And yet, any relief for one would be some relief for all. Do you see what I mean?"

The question was addressed to Edith specially.

"I'm not sure that I do," she replied, looking at him wistfully. "Is it this?—that, assuming what you do assume, it would be easier for you if I—I went away?"

"I shouldn't put it in just those words. I

only mean that what's hardest for you is hardest for me. I couldn't hold you to the letter of one contract if you were keeping the spirit of another. Do you see now?"

She didn't answer at once, so that Chip intervened: "Hasn't some one said — Shakespeare or some one—that the letter killeth? It seems to me I've heard that."

"You probably have. Some one has said it. But He also added, as a balancing clause, 'The Spirit giveth life.' That's the vital part of it. To find out where the spirit is in our present situation is the question now."

She looked at him tearfully. "Well, *where* is it?"

He rose quietly. "That's for you and Mr. Walker to discover for yourselves. I've gone as far as I dare."

"You're not going away?" she asked, hastily.

He smiled at them both. For the first time in Chip's acquaintance with him it was a positive smile. "I think you'll most easily find your way alone."

"Oh no. Wait!" she begged; but he had already lifted his hat in his stately way and begun to walk back toward the hotel.

Then came the bliss of being alone together. In spite of everything, they felt that. Edith leaned across the rude table, her hands clasped upon it. She spoke rapidly, as if to make full use of the time.

"Oh, Chip, what are we to do?"

He too leaned across the table, his arms folded upon it, the extinct cigar still between his fingers. He gazed deep into her eyes. "It's a chance. It will never come again. Shall we take it?—or let it go?"

"Could you take it, if I did?"

"Could you—if I did?"

She tried to reflect. "It's the spirit," she said, haltingly, after a minute. "Oughtn't we to get at that?—just as he said. We've had so much of—of the letter."

"Ah, but what *is* the spirit? How *do* you get at it? That's the point."

She tried to reflect further—further and harder and faster. "Wouldn't it be—what we *feel*?"

"What we feel is that—that we love each other, isn't it?—that we love each other as much as we did years ago—more!—more! Isn't that it?"

She nodded. "Yes, more—oh, much more! And yet—"

"Yes?" he said, eagerly. "Yes? And what, then?"

"And yet—oh, Chip, I feel something else!" She leaned still further toward him, as if to annihilate the slight distance between them. "Don't you?"

"Something else—how?"

"Something else—higher—as if our loving each other wasn't the thing of most importance. I thought it was. All these years—I mean latterly—I've thought it was. When we met in England I was sure it was. Since I've been back with him I've felt that I would have died gladly just to have one more day with you, like those at Maidenhead and Tunbridge Wells. But now—oh, Chip, I don't know *what* to say!"

"Is it because he's been so generous?"

She shook her head. "Not altogether. No; I don't think it's that at all. He's more than generous; he's tender. You can't think how tender he is—and always has been—with me and with the children. That's why I married him—why I thought I could find a sort of rest with him. You see that, don't you?—without

judging me too harshly. He's that kind. I'm used to it with him. He can't help being generous. I knew he would be when I told him we'd met in England. I told him because I couldn't do anything else. It was a way of talking about you—even if it was only that way. But, oh, Chip, if I left him now and went back to you—"

"Yes, darling? What?" He spoke huskily, covering both her hands with one of his and crushing them. "If you left him now and came back to me—what?"

She hurried on. "And then there's—there's the other woman. We mustn't forget *her*. What's her name, Chip?"

"Lily. She was Lily Bland."

"Yes, yes; of course. I knew that. And she loves you? But how could she help loving you? I'd hate her if she didn't. Curiously enough I don't hate her now. I wonder why? I suppose it's because I'm so sorry for her. She's a sweet woman, isn't she?"

He answered, with head averted. "She's as noble in her way as—as this man is in his."

"That's just what I thought. I used to see her when she came to our house to call for the

children. It never occurred to me that you'd marry her. If it had I don't know what I should have— But it's no use going back to that now. What would you do about her, Chip, if we decided to—to take the chance that's opened up—?"

"I don't know. I've never thought about it. I—I suppose she'd let me go—just as he's letting you go—if I put it to her in the right way."

"And what would be the right way?"

"Oh, Lord, Edith, don't ask me. How do *I* know? I should have to tell her—the truth."

"And what would happen then?—to her I mean."

"I've no idea. She'd bear up against it. She's that sort of person. But then, inwardly, she'd very likely break her heart."

"Oh, Chip, is it worth while? Think!"

"I *am* thinking."

"Is it the spirit? That's the thing to find out."

He shook his head sadly. "I don't know how to tell."

"But suppose I do? Would you trust to me? Would you believe that the thing I felt

to be right for me was the right thing for us both?"

"I think I should."

"Well, then, listen. It's this way. You know, Chip, I love you." She had his hand now in both of hers, twisting her fingers nervously in and out between his. "I don't have to tell you, do I? I love you. Oh, how I love you! It's as if the very heart had gone out of my body into yours. And yet, Chip—oh, don't be angry!—it seems to me that if I left him now and went back to you I should become something vile. It *isn't* because he's so noble and good. No, it isn't that. And it isn't just the idea of passing from one man to another and back again. We *have* turned marriage into opera bouffe, we Americans, and we might as well take it as we've made it. It isn't that at all. It's—it's exactly what you said just now: it's like a man swimming away from a sinking ship, and leaving his wife and children to drown, because he can't rescue them. Better a thousand times to go down with them, isn't it? You may call it waste of human material, if you like, and yet—well, you know what I mean. I should be leaving him to drown and you'd

be leaving her to drown; and, even though we *can't* give them happiness by standing by, yet it's some satisfaction just to *stand* by. Isn't that it? Isn't that the spirit?"

He withdrew his hand from hers to cover his eyes with it. He spoke hoarsely: "It may be. I—I think it is."

"But, *if* it is, then the spirit of the contract is different now from what it would have been—well, you know when. Then it meant that I should have stood by *you*—forgiven you, if that's the word—and shown myself truly your wife, for better or for worse. I didn't understand that. I only knew about the better. I didn't see that a man and a woman might take each other for worse—and still be true. If I had seen it—oh, what a happy woman I should have been to-day, and in all these years in which I haven't been happy at all! That was the spirit of the contract then, I suppose—but now it's different. It confuses me a little. Doesn't it confuse you?"

"Perhaps."

"Let me take your hand again; I can talk to you better like that. Now—*now*—we've undertaken new responsibilities. We've in-

volved others. We've let them involve themselves. We can't turn our back upon them, can we? No. I thought that's what you'd say. We can't. The contract we've made with them must come before the one we made with each other. We're bound, not only in law but in honor. Aren't we?"

He made some inarticulate sign of assent.

"And I suppose that's what he meant by the penalty—the penalty in its extreme form: that we've put ourselves where we can't keep the higher contract, the complete one, we made together—because we're bound by one lower and incomplete, to which we've got to be faithful. Isn't that the spirit *now*, don't you think?"

Again he muttered something inarticulately assenting.

"Well, then, Chip, I'm going." She rose with the words.

"No, no; not yet." He caught her hand in both of his, holding it as he leaned across the table.

"Yes, Chip, now. What do we gain by my staying? We see the thing we've got to do—and we must do it. We must begin on the instant. If I were to stay a minute longer now,

it would be—it would be for things we've recognized as no longer permissible. I'm going. I'm going now!"

There was something in her face that induced him to relax his hold. She withdrew her hand slowly, her eyes on his.

"Aren't you going to say good-by?"

She shook her head, from the little doorway of the rotunda. "No. What's the use? What good-by is possible between you and me? I'm —I'm just going."

And she was gone.

With a quick movement he sprang to the opening between two of the small pillars. "Edith!" She turned. "Edith! Come here. Come here, for God's sake! Only one word more."

She came back slowly, not to the door, but to the opening through which he leaned, his knee on the seat inside. "What is it?"

He got possession of her hand. "Tell me again that quotation he gave us."

She repeated it: "'The letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.'"

"Good, isn't it? I suppose it *is* from Shakespeare?"

"I don't know. I'll ask him—I'll look it up. If ever I see you again I'll tell you."

"I wish you would, because—because, if it gives us *life*, perhaps it 'll carry us along."

With a quick movement he drew her to him and kissed her passionately on the lips.

A minute later he had sunk back on the seat out of which he had sprung. He knew she was disappearing through the crowd that, satiated with gazing, was sauntering away from the parapet. But he made no attempt to follow her with so much as a glance. Slowly, vaguely, mistily, like a man tired of the earthly vision, he was letting his eyes roam along the line of shining spiritual presences.

THE END