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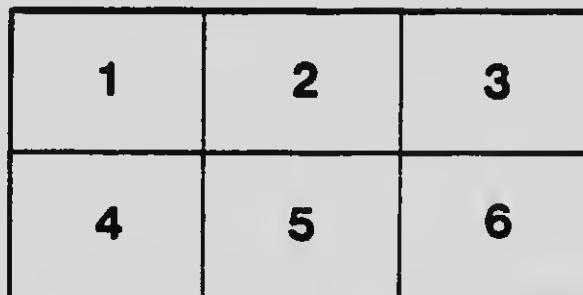
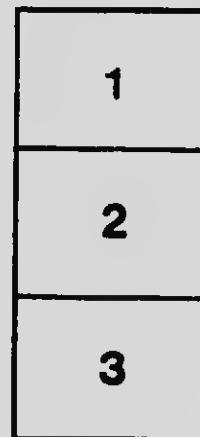
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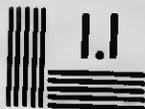
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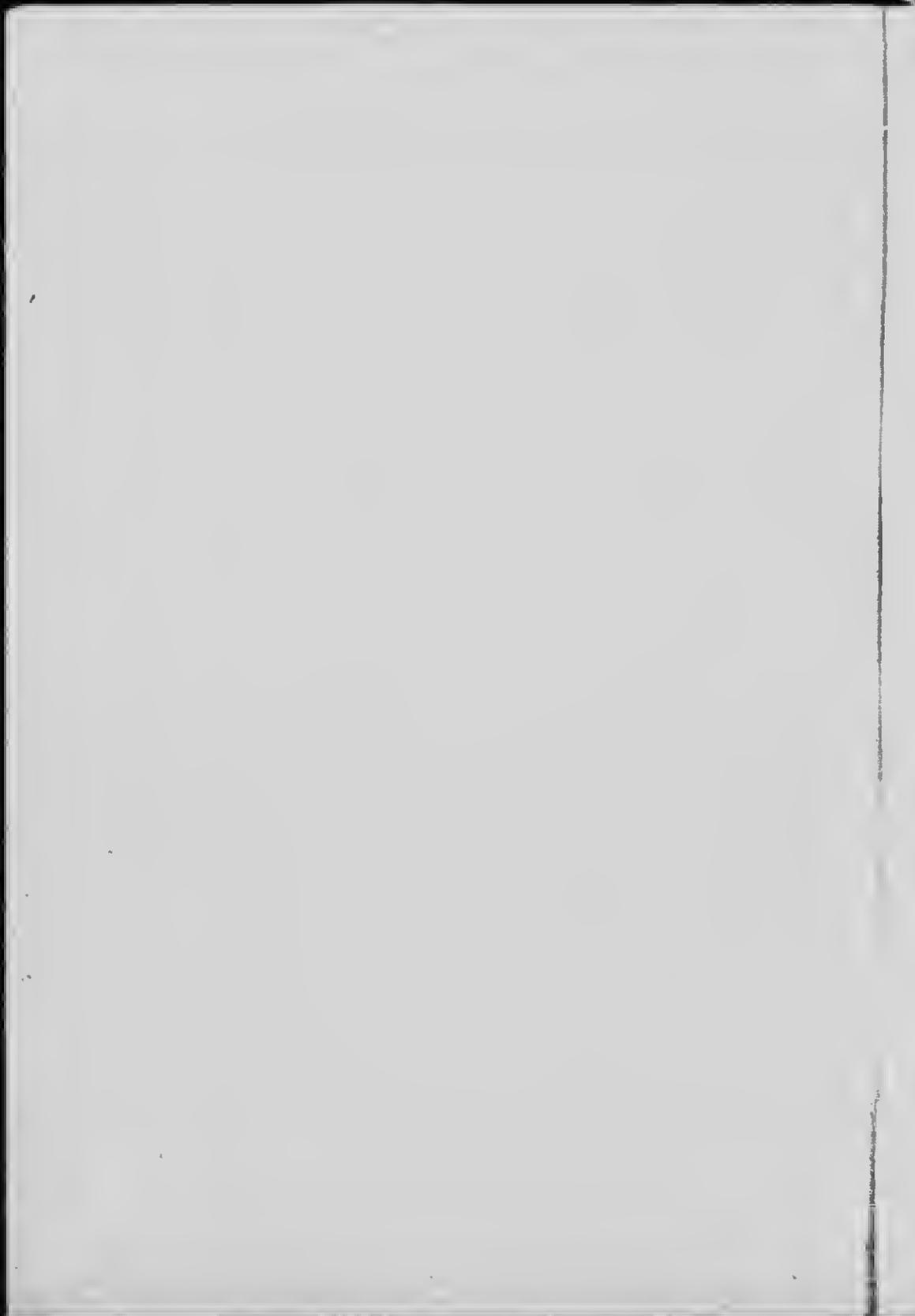
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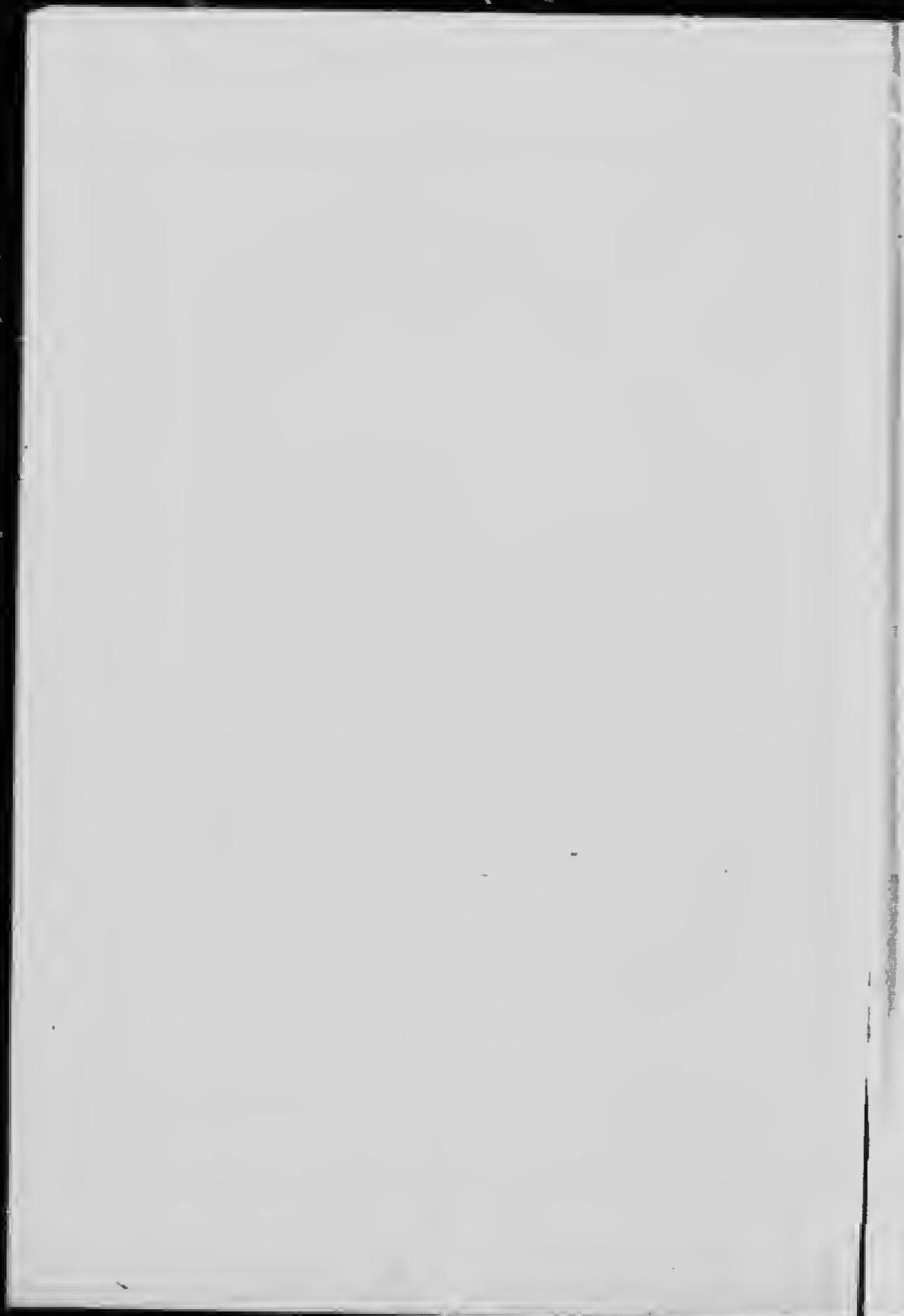
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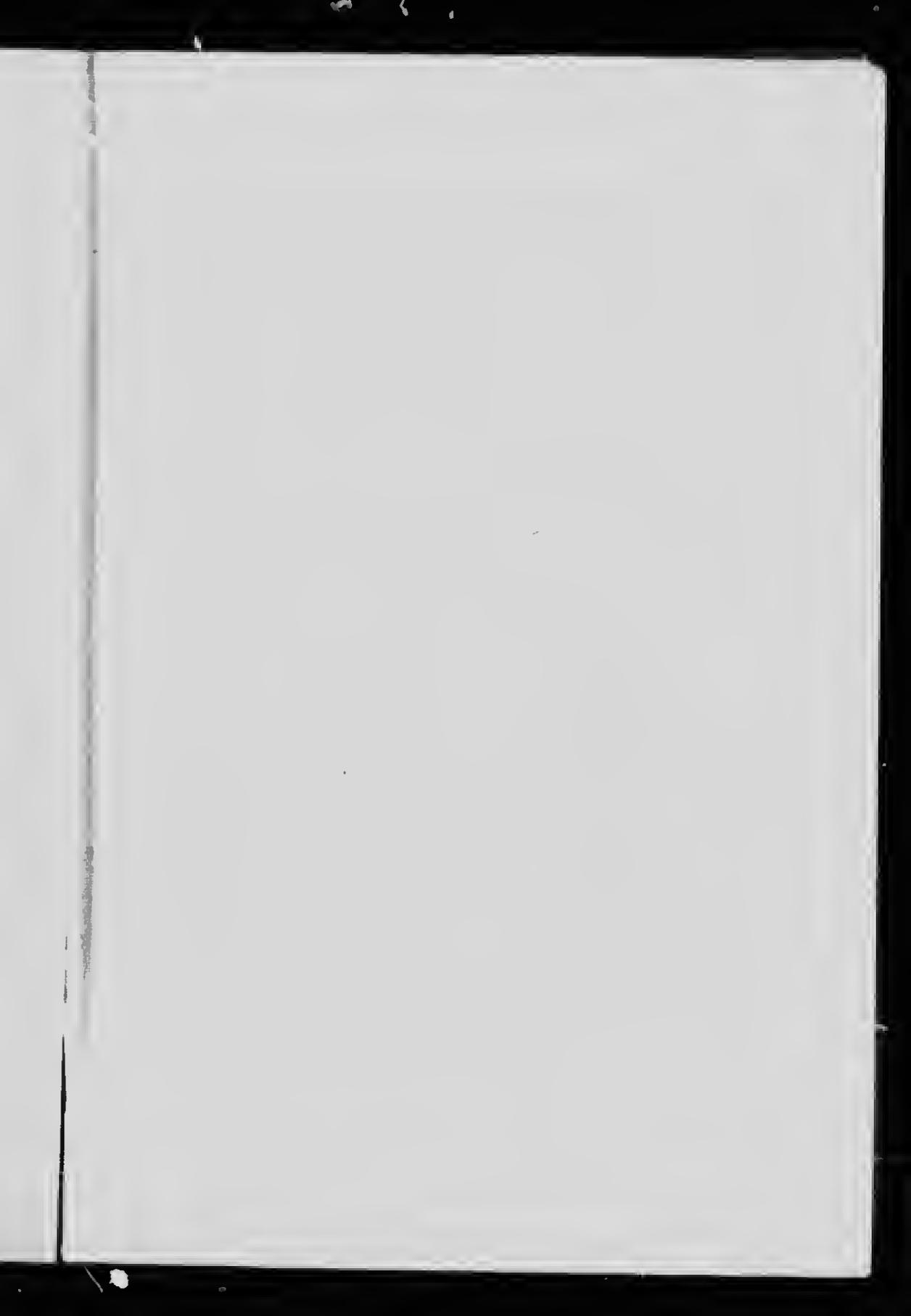
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THE LIFTED VEIL







SHE WAS CRYING BITTERLY, ALMOST HYSTERICALLY, AND WITH A HINT OF LAUGHTER IN HER TEARS

The Lifted Veil

By **BASIL KING**

Author of "The Side of The Angels"
"The Way Home," Etc.



WITH FRONTISPIECE
By **JAMES MONTGOMERY FLAGG**

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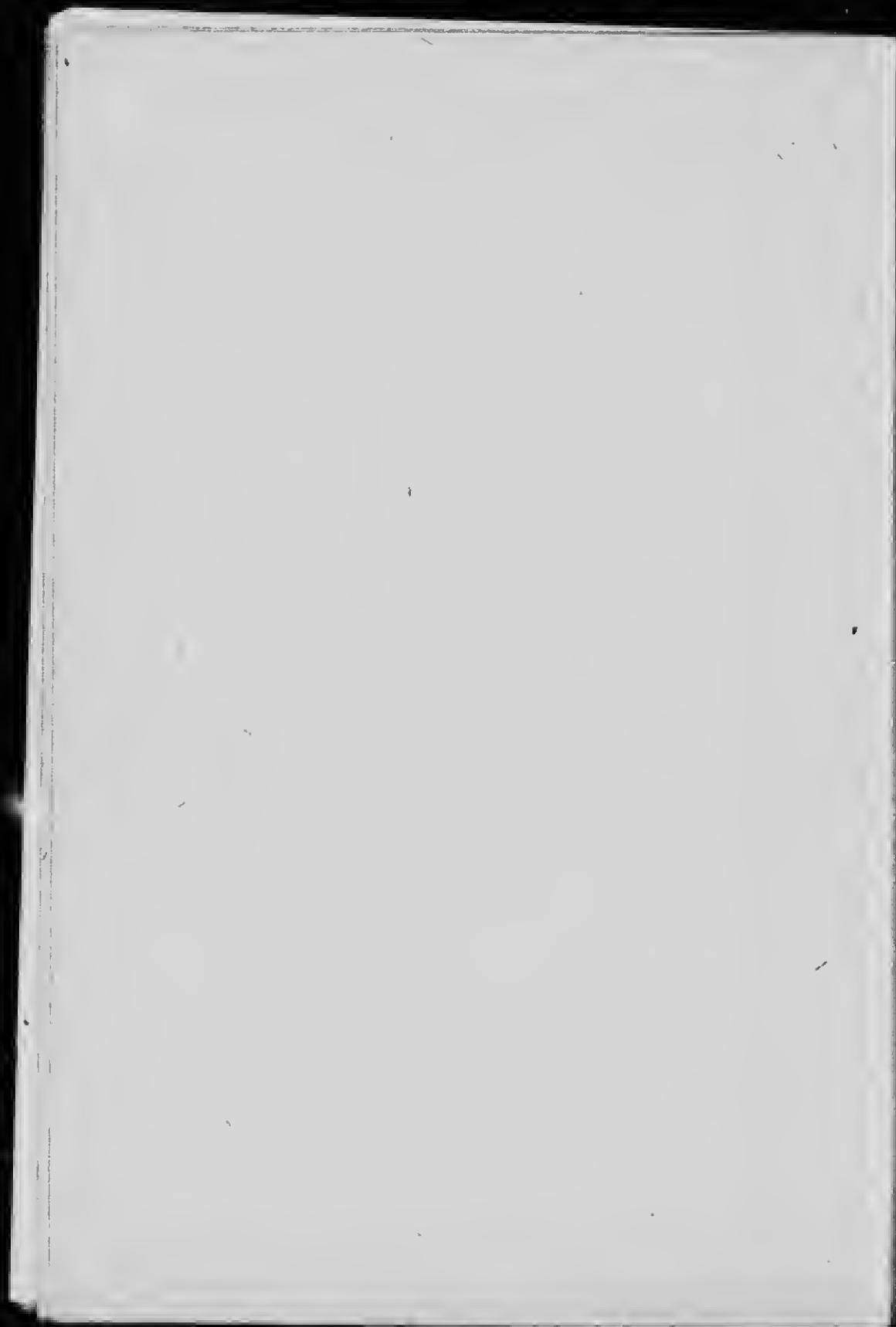
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CHAPTER I

AT the time it began Bainbridge was still a stranger in New York. He was so much a stranger as to be often lonely, sometimes bewildered, and homesick by fits and starts. When he was homesick it was not so much for any particular domestic group as it was for the well-ordered, stratified life he had known in Boston. New York perplexed him. If it had what he called an organized society its composition transcended his range. He could find neither beginning nor end to it, and no cohesion in its parts. Among the people whom he met he could see little more than a confusion of separate entities, each "on his own." They seemed to him to come from nowhere and to be on the way to nowhere. They gave no account of themselves and asked nothing of the kind from others. He appraised them as the sort of people among whom strange things happened and for whom there were no rules. They might be daring or eccentric or inconsequent or worse—very much worse—and no one would be surprised.

He himself was, therefore, not surprised when, in the early twilight of a November afternoon, a heavily veiled woman came to his house, asking to see him, but declining

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to give her name. Though no such incident had occurred to him as yet, he was mentally prepared for it, just as he was mentally prepared for any extravagance of thought or caprice of conduct. When Mrs. Wedlock, his housekeeper, a stout, motherly person with a fresh complexion, a perceptible mustache, and an English husband, appeared at the study door to say, "There's a lady in the hall, sorr, and she won't tell her na-ame," he replied, as a matter of course, "Show her in."

He was living at the time in one of the narrow-fronted, high-stooped, brownstone houses in West Forty-eighth Street which had not yet been modernized or made over to business. As a man of means he had taken the whole house, Mr. and Mrs. Wedlock giving him all the service he required. In the drawing-room which looked on the street he installed the white-and-gold tapestried French furniture that had been his mother's, and closed the door upon it. Of the large back room with the southern exposure—a library or secondary drawing-room it must have been when a family occupied the house—he made a convenient study, from which a door led into the dining-room, forming a kind of *enfilade*. In these two rooms, with a bedroom overhead, he lived in a comfortless bachelor comfort, which had at least the advantage of space.

It was one of his homesick days, one of the days when he felt himself dwarfed and stunned by the city's overpowering soullessness. It was not that he was unaccustomed to great capitals. He knew London and Paris and Berlin and Petrograd, to say nothing of Munich, Vienna, and Rome. But in each of these centers he had found some phase of the human, the amenable, the urbane. They were for man rather than man for them. They could be subdued and utilized and made to serve a purpose. One

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could be as much greater than any of them as the ship, with its adjusted machinery, is greater than the formless, weltering sea.

Here, on the other hand, the city was the thing—gigantic, tumultuous, terrifying, monstrous. It had aspects like those of a vast mechanism seen in a nightmare, pounding and stamping and pushing and shrieking and suffering, without pity as without rest. Of man it made nothing. He was mere grist for its mill, and was ground up in it. With no soul of its own, it mocked at the soul in him, and laughed down a belief in it. Bainbridge was coming to the conclusion that it was harder to have faith in a spiritual life in New York than in any other spot in the world. He was wondering miserably whether he should stand by the work he had undertaken or run away from it when Mrs. Wedlock came to his door to announce the visitor.

Being seated at the flat-topped desk which held the center of the room, with his back to the fading light, he rose as the tall figure, veiled and shrouded like a Mohammedan woman, appeared on the dim threshold. He had been expecting a book agent or a solicitor of subscriptions, but he could see at a glance that this was neither the one nor the other. In her carriage there was something that betokened refinement, and probably position in the world. More than this it was impossible to guess, because of the thick black veil and long black cloak.

"You don't know me," she said, in a voice so low that he could barely distinguished the words, "but that doesn't matter. I should like to talk to you, if you'll let me and have the time. Have you?"

"I've plenty of time. Please come in."

As he went forward to place a seat for her she slipped

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into an upright chair that happened to be standing near the door.

He himself sat down again at his desk, waiting for her to state her errand.

"I heard your sermon last Sunday afternoon," she began, in the same low voice, in which he recognized the educated tone, "and it seemed to apply to me."

"Indeed?"

"That is," she corrected, "it applied to me in the sense that it has made me think of things, and I've thought that perhaps you could help me. I dare say you can't," she went on, rather hurriedly, "and that it may be foolish on my part to have come."

"Nothing is ever foolish that we do from a good motive," he encouraged. "In all action the motive is the main thing—even when we make mistakes."

"Unless I tell you the truth," she pursued, "you can't help me."

"Probably not; but I shall have to leave that with you. Tell me whatever you think it right to tell—and don't be afraid."

"I *am* afraid—but neither does that matter very much. I'm a woman who would be called"—she hesitated, but urged herself onward—"who would be called—a sinner. You know what that means, don't you?"

"I know what *you* mean—or I think I do. If I'm wrong you must correct me."

She seemed to reflect. "Why do you speak of what I mean?" she asked at last. "Shouldn't you mean it, too?"

Bainbridge was glad that he couldn't see her face, since he felt the more free to speak frankly. "If there's a difference between us it probably comes from the fact

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that we've different conceptions of sin. You call yourself a sinner because you've done one kind of wrong thing, whereas to me you would have been a sinner whether you had done it or not."

"Yes, but only in the way in which every one else is a sinner—"

"The way in which every one else is a sinner is the way that counts. It isn't what we do that's so very important; it's our whole attitude of mind."

"That's something like what you said on Sunday; but I don't understand it. If what I do isn't important—"

"It *is* important—but less for itself than because it shows what lies behind it. It isn't the disease; it's the symptom."

"And you think that if there hadn't been one kind of symptom there would have been another."

"There are symptoms wherever there's disease. It's no use to consider the effect while we leave the cause undisturbed."

"In my case the cause was that I fell in love with a man I had no right to fall in love with, just as he had no right to fall in love with me. But, then, neither of us could help it."

Bainbridge smiled faintly. "You'll have to forgive me if I say that that, too, was an effect. The cause lay farther back."

From the way in which the veiled head was bent he gathered that she was trying to think this out. When she looked up it was to say: "Then I don't know what the cause is. I was all right before that."

"Were you? What do you mean by all right?"

"I hadn't done—I hadn't done anything wrong. I was what is called a good woman."

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"And yet the difference between a good woman and what is called a good woman is considerable. We must get away from what things are called and reach realities."

Again she took a long minute for reflection, asking at last, "Do you mean that I wasn't a good woman?"

He leaned on the desk, toying with a paper-knife. "That's hardly for me to say; but if you want to know my opinion—"

"Yes, I do."

"Then," he said, gently, "I shouldn't think it probable."

"Oh, but I *was*."

He knew he had shocked her from the uneasiness with which she stirred in her seat.

She went on, breathlessly: "I was a widow—quite young. I was very careful."

He rested his forehead on one hand, while the other continued to finger the paper-knife. "You say that you fell in love with a man you had no right to fall in love with, and that you couldn't help it. But a good woman would have helped it. The difference is there."

She threw up her head in indignation. "She would have helped it? How?"

"By her mental attitude. She would have been where the sort of thing that happened to you couldn't have reached her."

"Ah, that's easy to say!"

"It's easy to say because it's true. A good woman is shielded against this form of attack as she is against the unhappiness that springs from it."

Though she kept her voice low, there was a tragic emphasis in the declaration: "*That's not true. I've known good women who were unhappy just in the way I've been.*"

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"That is, you thought they were good; but there was a flaw in the goodness somewhere. Don't you see, it all lies in what we mean by right—and by wrong?"

"Well, what do we mean?"

"What do you mean yourself?—let us say by wrong?"

"By wrong I suppose I mean a transgression of the moral law."

"Yes; and what makes one transgress it?"

She considered this at length. "I suppose some phase of desire."

"That's a very good answer. So that back of the actual transgression is thought. If wrong wasn't first in the mind it wouldn't be in the body—or on the lips—or in the hand—or anywhere. Good and evil express themselves in act; but in fact they are mental sympathies."

"So that what you mean by a good woman—?"

"Is one whose thoughts are kept as strictly as possible with good."

"On, but what kind of a woman would that be?"

Raising his head, he looked at her through the gathering darkness. "The fact that you can ask that—"

"Shows that when I thought I was a good woman I was really a bad one. Is that what you were going to say?"

"No; shows rather that you've never understood what a good woman really is. The whole thing is mental. It's a matter of understanding. If your mind had been right your heart wouldn't have gone wrong. It couldn't have happened."

"If you were a woman—" she began to protest.

"It doesn't matter whether I'm a woman or a man. In good there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither male nor female. It's not a question either of sex or of psychology."

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"To me it seems both."

"Possibly; and yet so long as it does you'll be confused about yourself and perhaps go further astray."

He fancied she resented his language, since she again stirred uneasily and spoke in a tone slightly of offense. "I hadn't thought of myself precisely as having gone astray—"

"One doesn't unless one has the true norm of conduct before one. And yet whatever isn't normal is abnormal, just as whatever isn't straight is crooked."

"Oh, would you call it abnormal—doing as I did?"

"Abnormal in the sense that the only normal is the right."

"To me it *seemed* right."

"Right to do wrong? You admitted that it was wrong, didn't you?"

"Not all wrong."

"If it was wrong in any way—"

"We—we cared for each other. That in itself was a reason—"

"For betraying some one else?"

Once more the shrouded figure moved. "You're very severe."

"Is there any use in being gentle? If there is, tell me."

"You'd know that better if you knew what I've been through. It's what I hoped you'd let me speak to you about."

"Then I beg your pardon. May I ask you to go on?"

It was only after a silence that seemed long that she said, abruptly, "I never was happy—not till then."

As she was again silent: "Then? You mean when—"

"When—when it all came about. It took me—it took us—by surprise. We didn't mean anything—we didn't expect anything. It—it flared up."

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"Does anything ever flare up unless there's something of which to make a fire?"

"You must let me tell you," she said, irrelevantly. "I was born right here in New York, and I'm now exactly twenty-eight years old."

"You're young, then. I didn't know that, because I can't see you."

"I don't want you to see me. Not that you'd know me. I've never met you before, except for seeing you last Sunday in church. I don't generally go to church. I don't know what made me do it then, apart from having heard some friends of mine speak of your preaching; and it seemed to me that I must get out of myself or go mad."

"Then you're *not* happy."

"Not now; but I was—for a while. But you don't let me tell you." She began her explanations again. "We lived a good deal abroad, my mother and I. My father died when I was young. I had no brothers or sisters. It was in Europe we met a man who wanted to marry me. He was older than I—a good deal. I would rather not have married him because—"

As she hesitated he helped her out, "Because you didn't care for him?"

"Partly that, and partly that I had already seen a man who—who impressed me more—only that I wasn't exactly in love with him, either. He asked me, and I refused him, but I thought about him. And then this second man came—a rich man—a New-Yorker, too—and my mother seemed to want it—and so—"

"And so you accepted him?"

"He didn't live very long after we were married—only four years. That made me twenty-four when he died. He left me a good deal of money."

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"And the other man came back? Was that it?"

She shook her head. "No; he's in—in another country. I've never seen him since. He was striking—and perhaps if he'd— But he never came back. I read about him sometimes—in the papers. You'd probably know his name. He's been married since then—and is now a widower. But he has nothing to do with what I'm going to tell you—except that at one time if he'd only—only insisted a little more. . . . But all that's nothing. What really happened was with some one else."

To relieve her agitation he asked, in a commonplace voice, "Shall I turn on the light?"

She replied, quickly: "No; please! There's light enough, and I can tell you better as we are." A few seconds passed before she could resume her tale. "When my husband died I brought him back from Europe, where we had been living, to be buried in his own country. I forgot to say that my mother had died two years before. I realized then that it was the reason why she wanted me to marry my husband. She knew she couldn't be with me much longer, and so she wanted me to be taken care of. But that left me without friends—I mean any one very near to me."

"And you were only twenty-four," he said, sympathetically.

"There was just one person," she continued, "a woman, a distant cousin, two or three years older than myself. She'd been married about the same time as I had been. I'd known her all my life, without ever knowing her very well. She asked me to stay with her when I came back for the funeral—and then I met—I met her—her husband."

"I see."

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"Nothing happened at first—not for a long while. They persuaded me to stay in this country, and I took a house. We became very intimate. We're very intimate still."

"In spite of—"

"Yes; we have to be. I can't let her suspect that— But what happened was this." Again some seconds went by before she could continue. "But I needn't tell you that. You must see. I only want to say that I wasn't expecting anything. I was hardly *thinking* of anything—"

"You say hardly. That means that you *were* thinking—"

"We couldn't be meeting nearly every day without—"

"Oh yes, you could. The mental door had been left open, and so—"

"One's human," she protested, with a hint of tears.

"No; one's divine. That's what you don't seem to understand. By telling yourself that you're human you make yourself weak."

"But I *am* weak."

"No, you're strong. One is weak or strong according as one believes oneself. As a man thinketh— You know the rest of the proverb."

"It took me wholly by surprise," she pursued, "as it took him. I know he had never anticipated anything of the kind, or if he had he thought he'd be able to withstand it. It was one afternoon in the winter—late. His wife had sent him to my house with a message, and we'd been having tea together. There was a fire burning, and we'd been sitting in the half-light. It wasn't till he got up to go away that—that something came over us both. . . . It was sudden and electric—I'd never known an . . ."

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thing of the sort before. I'd never been in love with any one—not really. It didn't matter to me then that the man was some one I had no right to love—that he was another woman's husband. Nothing would have mattered to me, not if it was to be death the next moment. He kissed me; we kissed each other. It was—it was like a marriage—a marriage far more real than my real marriage. . . . It was two years ago."

"And since then—?"

"That's what I want to talk to you about. You see, it was this way. For the first year we lived in a kind of heaven. The secrecy and the deceit didn't matter to either of us. We often talked about that side of it, and said how strange it was that there should be people in the world who'd condemn us. It didn't seem wrong to us; it seemed right—and natural."

"That kind of lie is often told by sin, but it can't keep it up."

She drew a sharp, audible breath, but controlled herself sufficiently to say: "It didn't keep it up with us—whatever it was. I think it was he who felt it first."

"The man often does."

"I remember that it was toward the end of the first year that I began to see—or rather to feel—that he hadn't his own inner support, as at first. When he came to see me he was often grave and depressed. He began to be worried, too, for fear his wife should find out."

"Didn't he want her to find out—and set him free?"

"No; neither of us wanted that. I don't know why, exactly, but we preferred the situation as it was. If I couldn't hold him in that way I would rather have let him go."

"And couldn't you hold him?"

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"The question never rose. Before the year was past I began to have the same misgivings as he. It wasn't that I regretted anything. I'm not sure that I regret anything now. But—but I began again to see things as other people see them, and—and to be worried. From being worried I became unhappy, and from being unhappy—"

"You've become repentant. Is that it?"

"I don't know what repentance is. It's what I want you to tell me."

"Repentance is being sufficiently sorry for what one has done to give it up."

"If that's all it is, then—then I suppose I'm repentant. I've—we've—given it up."

"Since when?"

"More than six months ago. We meet—we have to—but—"

"Does that mean that you don't care about each other any more?"

Again he heard the hard-drawn breath. "I don't know what he feels for me. What I feel for him is chiefly—is chiefly pity. He's not happy; and yet he has to act as if he was."

"That is, he has to keep up the comedy of loving his wife when he doesn't."

"And never did. If you knew them you'd see how that could happen, and neither of them be to blame—or not much."

"Possibly; and yet we're less concerned with them than with you. Now that you've told me so much, may I ask you still another question? What is it exactly that you want me to explain?"

She considered this. The room was now so dim that

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he could barely distinguish her figure as something dark against the faint color of the bindings in a bookcase behind her. "I want to know this," she said at last. "Admitting that I'm repentant, in the sense you've given to the word, what will repentance do for me?"

"What do you want it to do for you?"

Again there was a pause for consideration. "I want it to put me back where I was before."

"Back where you were before—in whose estimation?"

"In my own. Can it do that?"

"It can't, of course, blot out the facts."

"Then what can it do?"

"It can give them another significance."

"What kind of significance?"

"It can make them the occasion of your turning to Good—God."

"But I'm not sure that I am."

"Then it can't do any more for you than it has done already. It can make you give up sin—and be unhappy."

He allowed her time to turn this over in her mind.

"What is turning to God?" she asked at last. "Is it going to church?"

"No; going to church has very little to do with it. Many people go to church who've never turned to God; and some people have turned to God who never go to church. I can't put anything so vast into a few words, any more than I can gather the sky into my hand, but I can give you a clue to what it means. Turning to God is perhaps first of all the training of one's mind to live with Good rather than with Evil. When you begin to do that—"

He could feel a certain eagerness in the tone with which she interrupted him. "Yes? What?"

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"You find that life resolves itself of its own accord into the normal—the natural—the peaceful. You put on what St. Paul calls the new man. In proportion as you do that the old man, the sinning self, grows less insistent, till finally it disappears."

"From the memory?"

"You may not want it to disappear from the memory when you see it as the starting-point of so much blessedness."

"Yes, if one does!"

"That would, of course, depend on yourself. There are plenty of people who would like the end, but who won't take the trouble to pursue the means. If you're going to do anything at all you must understand beforehand that it can only be through hard work."

"Hard work in what way?"

"In a good many ways. You'll have to take yourself in hand thoroughly."

"What should I have to do first?"

"Begin at the beginning. You speak of yourself as possibly repentant; but you can't repent of one sin, leaving the rest untouched."

"There's only one that has troubled me."

"But when you begin at the beginning you'll probably find a good many. There's something in the New Testament on the subject of bringing every *thought* into captivity to the obedience of Christ. You'd have to try to do that—make it a kind of goal."

On this she made no direct comment, again sitting for a time in silence. The obscurity deepened so fast that when she spoke her voice seemed to come to him out of darkness. "If I did, should I become good enough, let us say, to—to marry again?"

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He took time over his reply. "There's also something in the New Testament which says: 'If any man be in Christ he is a new creature. Old things have passed away; all things have become new.' Does that tell you what you want to know?"

"Not exactly; I'm asking—"

"You mustn't ask too much at once. In the life we're considering we take but one step at a time. Having taken that to the best of our ability, we see the next one."

"Then suppose I put it in this way: If a man were to ask me to marry him, should I be free to accept him—without telling him what I had done?"

He spoke with some fervor. "If you're repenting—or trying to repent—in order to be good enough to marry again, let me tell you now that you won't do it. You must be honest with yourself. You can't make a cat's-paw of God. The only motive for repentance is to put oneself into harmony with God. In proportion as you do that you receive good. Questions are answered and difficulties are smoothed away."

She put her inquiry into still another form. "And suppose that were to happen, should I be justified in letting a good man make me his wife?"

"You'd know that when the situation arose." He asked, on a sudden impulse, "The situation hasn't arisen, has it?"

"No. I'm only wondering. I merely want to get back—and be what I was before."

There was a sudden tenderness in his voice as he said: "When you want to be better than you were before you'll accomplish something. I don't think you will till then."

As she rose he followed her example, though he remained standing at his desk.

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"Thank you," she said, simply. "I'll go now. I think I understand what you mean. Perhaps some day I may find a way to let you know that I've profited by what you've told me. Good-by—and thank you again."

"Shall I show you to the door?"

"No; please don't. I know the way. Good-by; good-by."

Peering into the darkness, he could barely see that she passed swiftly and almost silently into the hall, though he remained standing and listening till he heard the street door close behind her.

CHAPTER II

TO this incident there was no sequel in Bainbridge's life for nearly a year and a half.

What the occurrence did for him first of all was to show him that even in New York there were people yearning and searching for some sort of spiritual rescue. It gave him, therefore, a zest in his work which was lacking before and a sense of being useful. When his heart was heavy it renewed his courage to think that he might be helping those for whom there was no one else to point the way. When his preaching tended to be lifeless, it added fire to his words to remember that the unknown woman might be listening. Where there was work to be done he easily found himself at home, and so ceased to pine, except at long-separated intervals, for Boston.

That he should think of his veiled visitor was natural. During the weeks immediately following their conversation he often fancied he saw her—in the street, in shops, in hotels, in church. He associated with her any face that caught his attention, any tall, gliding form. Of her voice he had hardly a recollection. Her speech had been, perhaps purposely, kept so low that his ear retained no more than the audible utterance of words.

And yet as time went on his imagination dwelt on her less and less. The impossibility of recognition was an element in this detachment, while new experiences of

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interest thrust into the background the memory of minutes of which the haunting power was chiefly in their mystery.

He began to make friends. Among the people of St. Mary Magdalen's he discovered, more or less below the surface, a degree of quiet, well-organized social cohesion of which even Massachusetts would not have been ashamed. In and through and under the city's turmoil he found that family life which neither the nation nor the world could do without, and with which he was glad to connect himself. It was not so obvious as it often was elsewhere, and yet could be extracted from the formless mass, like radium from pitchblende. With some slight surprise he learned that there were people in New York who cared for the same things as himself, and that in the crowded spaces of Manhattan neither civilization nor Christianity was quite submerged by the human tidal wave. With that perception his interest first in this little circle and then in that began to expand. He dined out a good deal; he joined one or two clubs. With an individual or a family here and there he formed sympathetic affiliations or ties of friendship. There were two or three houses, without marriageable daughters, to which he could turn when, for emotional reasons or because of fatigue, he specially needed a refuge.

He had thus all but forgotten the one striking incident of his first year in New York when it was recalled to him. As it was a Saturday morning, he was again in his study, preparing his sermon for the following day, when Mrs. Wedlock entered the room with a card. "The gentleman in the dressing-room, sorr. He's the wan with the chin-whiskers that's been here twice already, only you was out."

Taking the card, Bainbridge read the vaguely familiar

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name: "Sir Malcolm Grant." In the lower left-hand corner there was a further inscription, "Montreal," with a number to indicate a house in Sherbrooke Street.

The name and address drove all thought of Bainbridge's sermon from his mind. "He must want to be married," was the only explanation of the visit he could think of, while he directed Mrs. Wedlock to conduct the stranger from the adjoining room.

The new-comer proved to be a handsome man, very correctly dressed, perhaps in the early forties, and therefore some ten years senior to Bainbridge himself. Over six feet in height, with proportionate breadth of shoulder, he brought with him suggestions of the club, the race-course, and, as Bainbridge was to learn, the bank. With a fair mustache which did not conceal a good-humored mouth, with a fair imperial on a dimpled chin, with small blue eyes that twinkled and glinted when he spoke or when any one spoke to him, his expression was less of inexperience than of long-persisting boyishness. In contrast to Bainbridge, who was of no more than the middle height, slender, clean-shaven, and ascetic, he was as the flesh face to face with the soul. It was, however, the flesh with no stamp of evil on its comeliness, and much to commend its good looks. Toil had left no mark on it, nor suffering, nor reflection, nor excess. Its sensuousness was of the Anglo-Saxon brand, clean and sympathetic. A critic bound to find fault might have compared the man to a magnificent building, full of empty, swept, and garished rooms which had never as yet sheltered anything.

Between two men so obviously of the same traditions the greeting was without awkwardness. They did not immediately sit down, for the Canadian handed to Bainbridge an envelope sealed, but without address.

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"I'm asked," he explained, "to beg you to look at this." The voice was English, with that indefinable quality that betokens the man of the world.

Bainbridge broke the seal, and read, standing:

I am the woman who came to you eighteen months ago. Do you remember? If so, will you be good enough to tell the bearer what I told you then? I have tried to do so, but I find I cannot. Either the right words will not come out or he does not understand. I have told him, therefore, to listen to you—and go away or come back, as he judges best. As you will probably know his name it will be easy for you, if you choose, to learn mine; but I trust you. I said that some day I might find a way to let you know that I had profited by your words, and I think I can do it now.

Bainbridge read these lines a second time and a third. It was necessary for him to collect his thoughts and make sure of his connection with the incident to which the writing referred. Many women had come to him, on one errand or another, within the past year and a half, so that his recollection of the veiled stranger, while remaining apart from all others, had lost its vividness. Between each reading he glanced at the tall Canadian, who stood erect and soldier-like, waiting without impatience. Minutes had passed before Bainbridge could take upon himself his duties as a host and say, "Won't you sit down?"

They seated themselves on either side of the smoldering fire which the chill in the wind of the May day rendered acceptable. The clergyman sank absently into the long low arm-chair he was in the habit of using. The visitor, whose glove^d left hand rested on his hip, while his ungloved right held his hat and stick, took the round-backed

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office chair at the other end of the hearth-rug. Bainbridge gave the lines a fourth reading, in order to think out as rapidly and as clearly as possible what he should have to say.

"First," he observed, when the length of the silence had made it necessary for him to break it, "I ought to inform you that I don't know the name of the writer of these words, nor do I think I ought to know it."

"So she gave me to understand. From what I gathered that will not affect what you have to tell me."

Bainbridge felt that the way had been pointed for his next move. "What have you gathered?"

"Nothing—certainly."

"Well, then—uncertainly?"

There was the slightest hesitation. "Still—nothing."

"Still—nothing?"

"Still—nothing."

The last word had the ring of decision and finality. After scanning the lines once more, Bainbridge tore the paper into tiny shreds. Leaning forward, he threw the fragments into the fire. "Then I'm afraid I can't add anything to what you already know," he said, quietly, as he watched them burn.

The tall figure seemed to stiffen in surprise. "Does that mean that you don't trust me?"

"Not exactly. I do trust you. Only, you must see that this is a situation in which I'm unable to act."

"I'm afraid I don't see that, sir."

Bainbridge endeavored to explain. "A lady did come to me—about a year and a half ago—a lady I didn't know—closely veiled. But I've no positive assurance that this letter is from her." As the Canadian was about to protest the clergyman went on, quickly, "Even if I had it wouldn't

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make any difference, for the reason that the communication made to me then was, so to speak, under the seal of the confessional."

"But when she herself gives you permission—"

"If the permission were better guaranteed than it is I still couldn't avail myself of it. Whatever there is to be made known must lie between you and her."

"I've asked her to marry me," the stranger said, abruptly.

"I inferred that it was something like that."

"I asked her once before—years ago—but she refused me."

The incoherent story Bainbridge had heard from her own lips began to come back to him.

"After she refused me I married some one else; but my wife died when her baby was born the next year. The child died, too." For the space of a minute the somewhat expressionless, handsome face grew grave, but the cloud passed and the eyes glinted when he began to speak again. "Now that she's free—and I'm free—I've come back to her—with the result that she's given me this letter to you."

"And no other answer?"

"No other answer as yet."

"Then when you see her again will you tell her that I'm sorry, but that I've nothing to say?"

"You *have* something to say, if you'll only say it."

There was a tension in the minute which made it possible for the glances of the two to meet in a searching regard, without self-consciousness on either side. What Bainbridge saw was a man accustomed to be obeyed; startled, if not angered, by opposition. He answered carefully, therefore.

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"You'll do me a great favor, sir, if you consider me as having given my reply."

The response was disconcerting. "Which leaves a woman who may be innocent under suspicion. Have you thought of that?"

Once more the clergyman was obliged to choose his words. "Suspicion is chiefly in the mind of the person who suspects. It's something we can control, even when we can't altogether get away from it."

"Do you want me to understand that I *can't* altogether get away from it?"

"I want you to understand nothing whatever—from me. Your source of information is elsewhere, if you must have information."

"It's not a question of what I must have, but of what she wants me to know."

"Then she's at liberty to tell you. As it is, one of two things strikes me as wise. It would be better either for you not to press the matter further, or for her to take on herself the responsibility of making her own confidence."

The Canadian responded with some exasperation: "I don't want to press the matter further, the Lord only knows; and yet now that the question has been raised.

. . . You see," he went on, in another tone, "it might not be right for me in my situation to go it blind. If I tell you the circumstances you'll understand how the matter stands with me."

Bainbridge expressed his willingness to listen to anything his visitor chose to impart.

"My father," the latter stated, "was a well-known Canadian banker. The banking profession is a more important national institution in our country than it is in this, for reasons that I sha'n't attempt to go into. I was

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the elder of the two sons, and succeeded my father in the business. He was already in a big way of doing things when the expansion of Canada, which began in the middle nineties, gave him further openings. He was a philanthropic, public-spirited man, not unknown in the United States—"

"I recognized your name, without having anything exact to connect with it."

"That is, you recognized my father's name. He was created first a K. C. B. and afterward a baronet by Queen Victoria, not long before she died. That's how it happens that I've a handle to my name, when I've done nothing to deserve it. But it's not wholly to the point. What I want you to see is that I can give my wife a good position—one in which she'd have, within reason, brilliant opportunities."

"I can quite understand that."

"And," he pursued, not wholly with ease, "just as I like to feel that the position is good enough for her, so I want to be sure that—you mustn't think me fatuous or an ass!—I'm not a very young man any longer and my situation as head of the family obliges me to think of it!—so I want to be sure—to be awfully crude and put it into very plain language!—that she's good enough for the position. Do you see?"

He had reddened as he continued to speak, though Bainbridge was too deeply interested to notice it. "Wouldn't that depend to some extent on what you mean by good?—and good enough?"

"What does any one mean? I suppose I'm thinking of the usual thing."

"The usual thing," Bainbridge repeated, ponderingly, "doesn't take us very far, does it?"

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"If it's as far as I need to go, why isn't enough?"

"If it's as far as you need to go—then, sir, I'm afraid that I can't make any other suggestion."

The sympathetic carnal face looked blank. "What other suggestion could you make?"

"Only one that might help you to another idea of goodness."

The puzzled, uncomprehending look persisted. "What is it—the other idea of goodness?"

"Merely this, that goodness isn't wholly in doing or not doing certain things: it's in a point of view."

"And yet where there has to be a point of view there must be something to consider."

"Isn't there always something to consider?"

"Not always something mysterious and grave; and where a woman is in question we can only refer to the mysterious and grave to one particular."

"Whether the person in question is a woman or a man our standard of right action has to be the same."

"Our standard of right action? I don't think I know what you mean."

"I mean nothing abstruse or far-fetched—nor more than the ancient law we call the golden rule."

"Oh!" The Canadian pondered on this. "That is, if—if what—what I'm afraid of should prove true I ought to stand by her as, in the same set of circumstances, I should want her to stand by me. Is that it?"

"I'm not applying the law; I'm only pointing it out. All I say is that it's there, and that life becomes very much simplified when we obey it. Whether you obey it or not must be for you to decide."

As the banker rose slowly to his feet he said, dryly,

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"If I marry her—and she marries me—I think I can say it will not be for any such reason as that."

Bainbridge leaned back in his chair, his head against the cushion, gazing up at this splendid sample of physical manhood. That so lovable a giant should love any woman in vain seemed scarcely credible. Vaguely it came back to him that his veiled visitor had confessed that this man had impressed her, that if he had only insisted. . . . But aloud he said, quietly, "Then unless you change your mental basis I think it very likely that you won't marry her—and that if you do marry her you will both come to grief."

To the clergyman's amazement the stranger pressed the back of his gloved left hand against his eyes, as if to exclude some agonizing vision, while the lips were sharply contracted as in the effort not to cry out in pain. It was all over within the space of ten seconds, but the glimpse of a restrained man's suffering was one which a looker-on would not soon forget. As Bainbridge got himself to his feet he would have given a hand to be able to say that there was no need for this emotion; but before he could speak the banker had control of himself again. That is, he was able to turn fiercely on his host, as though accusing him of some wanton form of crime, and say:

"If it wasn't true you'd tell me."

Bainbridge answered as coldly and calmly as his own sympathy would allow. "I should tell you nothing whatever. From anything I've said you've no right to draw an inference. The confidence made to me is as sacred in the case of innocence as in that of guilt." His face, in which there was always a glow, became radiant as he added: "But I'll go as far as to say this, that a man's love can do anything for a woman, if it's of the right sort—if it's big

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enough and strong enough and true enough. If you yourself can supply that—”

“But if I can’t? If my love is just—just of the ordinary kind?”

“Then you’ll have to make it of the extraordinary kind or pay the penalty.”

The Canadian glared at the speaker of these words as a big dog in a rage glares at a little one who dares to withstand him. There was rejection of counsel in the manner in which he turned away and strode toward the hall.

Bainbridge, who had followed his guest to the front door, stood with his hand on the knob. “Unfortunately I can say no more than I’ve said already,” he observed then. “You’re in a place in which a man must act entirely for himself. I would only beg you not to forget the redeeming quality that belongs to the higher kind of love—”

The other man had by this time resumed the manner of conventional intercourse. “I’m afraid I can’t go in for the fine points,” he said, with a wistful smile. “If I’m in love, it’s in the way that other men are. All the same, I’ll try to think of what you’ve said.” He held out his hand. “Good-by—and thank you. If we ever meet again, and you should find me married, I should trust to your discretion.”

“You forget,” the clergyman corrected, in opening the door, “that if I should find you married I shouldn’t know whether it was to this particular lady or to some one else.”

“Quite so,” the banker assented, as he began to descend the steps. “I *had* forgotten that.”

CHAPTER III

ONCE more the curtain was rung down on the drama of which Bainbridge had taken part in but two small scenes. Another year and a half went by, bringing him to the age of thirty-three, before he was obliged to recur to it.

Once more, too, the pressure of small happenings had almost crowded both incidents from his memory. He did not, of course, forget the coming to him either of the veiled woman or of Sir Malcolm Grant, but he forgot, partially, what they had told him. Many people were beginning to seek him with their confidences, financial, domestic, religious, and in the course of time one such event melted into another. He made no notes, as a doctor of the names and symptoms of his patients, and as a matter of fact was only too glad to let the details of perplexity and care pass into that mental limbo which was all but oblivion. When the same person came to him the second time he was generally able to take up the narrative where it had been dropped; but, as a rule, one man's troubles pushed another's from his mind, till a need arose for going back to them.

Malcolm Grant became to him, therefore, but a dim Herculean Scotch-Canadian with whom he had once had a few minutes of intimate talk. At long intervals he saw his name in the papers, as being at one or another of the New York hotels, or as the head of a house taking part in

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some large enterprise in Canada, Cuba, or South America. Once or twice, in conversation with Canadians whom he chanced to meet, it occurred to him to ask if the baronet had married, but he repressed the inquiry as verging too closely on mere curiosity. He speculated now and then on what might have happened between Grant and the woman after the former had left his door; but as far as he was able to control his thoughts, he kept himself from doing even that. He made it a point of honor to believe that a man in his position should give himself wholly for the moment to the sins and sorrows that were being aired, and then dismiss all recollection of them from his mind. He found that in proportion as he could put these secrets away till it became necessary to take them up again he won peace for himself and ease of manner for his confidants, when he met them again.

Finding himself useful, he saw the city in which he labored with more and more sympathetic eyes. The rush, the din, the brutality grew incidental. His parish, of which he was assistant rector, became a little world in itself, in which he was brought into contact with the whole round of human nature in epitome.

If you know New York you must know St. Mary Magdalen's—the quaint, dumpy, architecturally monstrous, sentimentally attractive, red-brick church with Doric brownstone portico, between Forty-seventh and Forty-eighth streets, on the right-hand side as you go toward the Park. Erected in the days when there was not too much money to spend on it, it is now adorned with costly offerings wherever the authorities can put them. Its bronze doors have been copied from those of the baptistry in Florence, its stained-glass windows from Chartres and Bourges, its choir-stalls from Lincoln,

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its reredos from Canterbury, its pulpit from Cologne. Merely to go round it is to make a miniature grand tour. To read the names of the owners of the pews, inscribed on little brass-framed cards on the desks for books of devotion, is to come close to people of the first distinction. Something of their personalities seems to linger in these consecrated seats, though they themselves may be as far away as Deauville, Lenox, or England. Up the aisles have marched many of New York's most historic brides, now wearing coronets and adorning châteaux and castles. The vested choir is the best and most expensive in the country; the organist was tempted away by an astonishing salary from a work he liked better at Wells. All that is high-priced and handsome is provided at St. Mary Magdalen's and offered to the public free of charge.

Old Doctor Galloway, the rector, had been responsible for this elaboration, in which Bainbridge tried to see an instrument ready to his hand. In mere ecclesiastical dash and splash it had been his task to discover a soul, and indeed he had been selected for that purpose.

"You see," Doctor Galloway explained, at their first interview in Boston, "I'm an organizer. Primarily I'm a man of business. When Mannering left and I succeeded him, thirty-odd years ago, there was a good deal at loose ends. Now everything's shipshape, and we've all the money we want. But what we haven't got is the thing for which this well-equipped institution has been planned and supported. As far as that goes, St. Mary Magdalen's is a barren fig-tree. New York's as rich a field for it as any heathen land, and yet it's out of any line to give. You'd find me as much in need of it as any one."

Bainbridge, who was then but twenty-nine, looked at the leonine white head in dismay. No lieutenant who had

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been asked by a general to come and command an army could have a keener sense of the irony of the invitation accorded him. He urged his age, his inexperience, his incompetence.

"Don't expect you to do everything all at once," the old man replied. "What I'm looking for is some one who'll grow up to the work, so that by the time he's equal to it he'll know its ins and outs. You can't bring a mature man from Chicago or San Francisco to New York and expect him to find the methods used in the one place adapted to the needs of the other. Civilization in our country is not national so much as it's civic. We're a congeries of little municipal republics, each with its tricks and passwords. New York has them, just like Boston or St. Louis or St. Paul. Come and learn them, so that when you're ripe for it you can do us good."

He went on further to explain the peculiar composition of St. Mary Magdalen's. It was made up of strata running in parallel lines, each superimposed on the other. First there was the original bedrock of old New York families, mostly of great wealth, who owned the pews and used them but spasmodically. Above them were to be found people of the same antecedents but of more moderate means, like the Endsleighs, the Jarrotts, the Colfaxes, and the Pallisers, who habitually lived in New York and carried the workings of the parish on their shoulders. Above them, but independent of them, was the transient contribution made by the great hotels and apartment-houses which during ten years had sprung up between Forty-second Street and the southern edge of the Park. Above them, again, numerous enough to be noticeable, was the variety of worshiper that only America could furnish, who attended St. Mary Magdalen's because it was in

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Fifth Avenue and within its walls they rubbed elbows with people of whom otherwise they knew nothing but the names and the scandals. On the surface of all was the mere human dust, the sight-seers, the passers of a month or a day, who, finding themselves with a Sunday or two to spend in New York, took in this show as they took in other shows, coming to hear the music and watch the great people at prayer—and seeing chiefly one another. And in and out among them all, a few from one class and a few from another, were scattered those kindly, honest, and consecrated souls who stood for what is best in human life and made all the effort and expense worth while.

To his vestry, when he returned, he spoke of the young man as no abler and no more energetic than many another young man. His recommendation was that he had spiritual insight; he had that endowment without which, in the ministry, no other endowment has value, of communicable goodness. When it was added that the young fellow was of clean, sympathetic appearance, of a good Boston family, and had private means, it seemed to the worthy professional and business men who governed St. Mary Magdalen's that they had discovered the teacher of whom they were in need, however little they bound themselves to follow his example.

All that having been four years earlier, Bainbridge found that little by little the indications given him were fulfilled, and had been able to "shake down." Difficult as the latter process had been, he had lived through it with success. He was happy, therefore, in his work, while the appeal which people of all kinds and characters made to him for counsel established that conviction—illusory, perhaps—of being essential to his task, which

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makes for enthusiasm in fulfilling it. He was never thoroughly content when away from it. This man's sins or that woman's cares were generally on his mind. The great city having thus become not merely a home to him, but the source of those actions and reactions, tragic, comic, social, moral, and emotional, which express the dynamic energies of life, he drew daily stimulation from its vigor.

And that a man so happy, so successful, so good-looking, and so well-to-do should still be unmarried became a stone of stumbling to every second woman who attended St. Mary Magdalen's. Bainbridge knew this in a general way, and smiled within himself. He had no definite intention of being married, not even to Mary Galloway, the rector's daughter, on whom the consensus of parochial opinion bestowed him, though she was one of the sweetest girls he knew.

He made this last admission on a morning in the autumn when Mary Galloway stopped him on the rectory steps, as he was coming away from a conference with her father. Her smile was an apology for interrupting his course toward Fifth Avenue.

"Oh, Mr. Bainbridge," she said, in the tinkling crystalline voice which held a hint of jest in reserve "I just want to remind you that poor Miss Higgins's reception comes this afternoon. I know what you're going to say—that you won't have time. But do look in on her, if it's only for five minutes. It will give her so much pleasure—and the poor thing doesn't have a great deal. I'm drumming up all the people I know."

He answered more or less at random, because he was saying to himself that if it was in him to fall in love again this was probably his opportunity. He noticed, too, that

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the crisp autumn morning had given her a color for which no word in the language and no tint in the painter's palette was precisely adequate. She must now, he reckoned, be twenty-six, as she had been twenty-two the year of his coming to New York. In refinement she was a lady to the finger-tips, nor did she lack a demure prettiness, behind which there was a dash of fun. She had been abroad during most of his first two years at St. Mary Magdalen's, but he had remarked that since her return she had adopted, as far as he was concerned, a policy of keeping out of sight. That this withdrawal had anything to do with himself personally it had never occurred to him to think, nor did it so occur now. It only led him to say, after glancing at his engagement-book and promising to look in at Miss Higgins's, "Where have you been this long time and why does one never see you?"

Her answer was delivered with a scornful little smile and a toss of the head which might have been a mask for shyness rather than an expression of disdain. "That depends on whom you mean by one. Some people see me."

"I never do—or rarely."

"That's because you're not in the places where I am. But I assure you I don't become invisible."

"Then I shall count on you to look after me at Miss Higgins's this afternoon," he called after her, as she ran up the steps.

"Oh, poor Miss Higgins!" she threw over her shoulder. "If you'll only come I'll do anything."

And yet when he arrived at Miss Higgins's apartment, in a small residential hotel between Fifth and Sixth avenues, Mary Galloway didn't give him so much as a glance. Helping the hostess, serving tea, introducing

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guests, moving hither and yon through the crowded tiny parlor, in which it was difficult to stir or to breathe, she seemed unaware that he was in the room. Miss Higgins herself, a tall, gaunt woman, suggesting an ostrich metamorphosed into human form, was so arch as to mention her in the act of shaking hands with him.

"Oh, Mr. Bainbridge! So flattered, I'm sure! So good of you to have come! And Mary will be so pleased. She's helped me so much that it's really her party more than mine. So sweet, she is. You can see her now, talking to old Mrs. Colfax—just there—with the olive-green hat. . . . Oh, how do you do, Mrs. Jarrott? So flattered, I'm sure. So good of you to have come! Mrs. Jarrott, do you know Mr. Bainbridge? . . . Oh, how do you do, Mrs. Palliser? So flattered, I'm sure. So good of you to have come. Mrs. Palliser, do you know Mr. Bainbridge? . . . Oh, how do you do, Mrs. Mortimer. . . ."

With the mechanical repetition of a doll wound up to say so many words and make so many smiling grimaces Miss Higgins went on with the task of welcoming her guests, while Bainbridge found himself slowly swirled away, like a plum in a boiling pudding, in company with the woman he knew best in New York.

"So you're here!" Mrs. Palliser gasped. "Well, for pity's sake! More of Mary's doings, I suppose. If she hadn't dragged me in by the hair of my head Miss Higgins wouldn't have seen so much as my shadow. The people look like job lots at an auction," she whispered. "Do come over into that corner with the little red sofa behind the palms, and let us sit down."

Beneath the high yapping of voices, which, if you listened to it consciously, became persistent, pitiless, and infernal, Mrs. Palliser could make herself heard by speak-

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ing in a low and perfectly natural tone. She was the daughter of Charlie Endsleigh, a pioneer in developing the upper reaches of Fifth Avenue, from whom she had inherited her not inconsiderable fortune. As an Endsleigh she was related to the Colfaxes, the Jarrotts, and the Wrenns, which placed her in that circle in New York identified with religion, education, and philanthropy. The fact posed her solidly on ground on which she had authority. Authority was written on her face and figure, and translated in her manners and her tone of voice. She was invariably mentioned as a fine-looking woman, being tall and statuesque, with fairly good features and a slight inclination to be florid. Moreover, she was breezy, high-tempered, and imperious. She was outspoken, too, with the frankness of one who has a right to express her opinion.

Bainbridge listened with amusement as from the vantage-point of the sofa in the corner she denounced the company.

"In all my life I've never looked at such a crew. There are not more than six people whom I know—whom anybody knows—and the six are my own relations. Why, Mary Galloway should have got us here I can't imagine to save my soul. Why should any one be here? and why should a person like Miss Higgins want to give a party? Can't the good woman see that her very existence is matter of easy-going social tolerance, and keep herself to the background where she belongs?"

On a question or two from Bainbridge, who knew Miss Higgins only as a figure flitting in and out of St. Mary Magdalen's, especially at important weddings and funerals, Mrs. Palliser accounted for her hostess with some detail. The clergyman listened, for the reason that he

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found it profitable to know all he could learn about each of his parishioners, without paying attention to gossip. For him Miss Higgins was more than an old maid, struggling, probably on narrow means, to keep a footing in New York. In spite of her mildly grotesque appearance and her simpering smiles she was a human being, like any other—a human being with hopes and cares and heartaches, to whom he might on some occasion possibly be useful.

Miss Higgins, according to Mrs. Palliser, had never really been "in society," but then she had never really been out of it. She was asked to big things—things to which every one to whom any one owed anything came in hordes. No one knew exactly what was owing to Miss Higgins beyond the fact that on such occasions she was generally invited. It would have been taxing the memory too far to go back to the period in the middle eighties when old Peter Higgins had begun to make a splurge, for the splurge, having risen and come in like a tidal wave, had subsided and gone out in the same way, leaving Miss Higgins landed and stranded on the shore. On the shore she had remained, never climbing up the bank, but never slipping back into the water.

"It isn't so much that people know her," Mrs. Palliser continued to explain, "as it is that they're used to seeing her, in the way they're used to seeing certain shadows at certain hours of the day. She minces in and out of drawing-rooms as inoffensively as a spirit and almost as unperceived. From November to May you'll find her standing in corners and drinking uncountable cups of tea, but the poor soul doesn't do any one any harm and makes an enemy of no one."

"Not even of you?" Bainbridge smiled.

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"Good gracious, no! Why should I be her enemy? You might as well be the enemy of a sheep."

He remembered these words and this tone when, not long afterward, he learned that Miss Higgins was a power in New York, and toyed with love and destiny as if she was one of the three Fates.

But Mrs. Palliser had already had enough of a subject which she regarded as tiresome. Without preamble or transition she went on abruptly to say, "Isn't Mary too sweet for anything?" Before Bainbridge could agree with her she added, "Why on earth don't you marry her?"

He laughed good-naturedly. It was not the first time she had attacked him thus, though perhaps never so directly from the front. After all, she was the one woman in New York who could take this liberty, for she and her husband had had him under their wing ever since his early days at St. Mary Magdalen's. Being a few years older than he, they had been able to act as social counselors and guides to the young Bostonian without losing the fellowship of contemporaneous sympathies. He came to be at ease with them, to be able to unbend in their company as he never did elsewhere. As time went on Mrs. Palliser began to throw a motherly eye over his bachelor establishment, seeing that Mrs. Wedlock cleaned it in the proper way on the proper occasions and gave him proper food to eat. For this he was grateful for the motive rather than for the result, while the ties of intimacy were strengthened.

As for the present question, his instinct was to hedge rather than to face it openly. "Isn't marriage a matter to be tackled from the positive rather than the negative point of view? If you go round asking every one why they

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don't marry some one else, who knows where you'll come out?"

She answered, while taking a cup of tea from a neat little maid who passed it on a tray. "My dear good man, where I come out is my own affair. I can take care of myself if you could do the same for yourself."

"I should like to be allowed to make the attempt."

"Yes; like a child walking in his sleep. When it comes to marriage a man like you is as fit to take care of himself as a stray pet lamb to avoid the traffic in Broadway. If the right woman doesn't get you the wrong one will; and that you can take from me."

"I'm willing to take anything from you, as I'm sure you must know. But may I ask if you see any signs of it?"

"It's not a question of what I see signs of; it's only one of what happens. The longer I know you're going round loose the more wretched it makes me."

"I see; I see. You want me to marry for your peace of mind, not for my own. Of course when you put it that way, anything I can do—"

"I don't put it that way. It's nothing to me, further than that I want to see you safe."

"Well, then, I'll let you know the minute I feel in danger."

"When I can't do any good. Nine times out of ten a drowning man doesn't know he's drowning till it's too late to pull him out. And when you could have a girl like Mary Galloway—"

"Ah, but could I?"

"You might if you tried. I don't say she's breaking her heart for you, but . . . Ah, well!" She rose with a sigh, while he placed her empty cup on a near-by table. "If she won't do I shall have to find some one else who will."

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"Please don't let me put you to any trouble."

"You put me to a great *deal* of trouble; but it's nothing to what I'm willing to take for you. Now I come to think of it, I do know a woman who might care to look you over."

"Oh, but I might balk at that."

"Since you're bound to be some woman's prey a good one might as well have the refusal of you—even if she turns you down."

"But you won't let her take me by surprise?"

"She won't take you by surprise, because you won't know anything about her. She'll come and go without your seeing that she's been there. If I don't get out of this rat-trap," she exclaimed, holding out her hand to him, "I shall smother. Good-by. Think over what I've been saying, and don't forget the twenty-ninth."

He looked blank. "The twenty-ninth?"

"Don't tell me you've forgotten that you're going to dine with us that night. If you have, then all is over between you and me. But I give you the benefit of the doubt and leave you. Go and tell Mary that I shall never forgive her for bringing me to this ridiculous zoo."

Through the seething of the human whirlpool he made his way toward Mary Galloway. "Is this the way you look after me?" he asked. "Don't you remember what you promised to do if I came?"

When his words brought a new shade of color to her cheek he thought he had never seen anything so exquisite. Nevertheless, she tossed her head with that air of disdain which might have been no more than a covering for shyness as she said, "I saw you were very well protected."

"Did you? But there are times when a man doesn't need protection so much as sympathy."

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"Was this one?"

He thought of what Mrs. Palliser had been saying and laughed. "I almost think it was—if rightly understood."

"Then before I offer you the sympathy I must have the right understanding."

"Ah, that's not so easy," he was able to say before a new revolution in the crowd carried him away from her and he turned to take leave of his hostess.

But he was asking himself if, after all, Mrs. Palliser might not be right. He was not in love with Mary Galloway—not as yet—but if he could be—and he ever meant to marry at all. . . .

He was in the gloomy little outside hall, waiting for the lift, as he began making these reflections, but he was destined not to pursue them. The lift came to a sudden stop within its grille and the door was slid open.

The next two minutes remained in Bainbridge's mind as a period of impressions so rapid, so sharp, and so definite as to obliterate the sense of time and make him feel that he had lived through an experience.

A woman who had been sitting on the lift's little red-cushioned bench rose and made the one step necessary to reach the door. She was a tall, slender woman, richly dressed. Dark-brown plumes and velvet, against which a row of great pearls caught the eye strikingly, were but details in a picture vividly imprinted on his mind as one of extraordinary distinction. His memory would have recorded it if she had merely passed him in the street; but, as it was, what happened within the next few seconds burned it in as something he could not forget.

On the threshold of the lift, before she had stepped out of it, the woman raised her eyes, which he could see were dark and curiously deep—started—drew back—turned

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as if looking for something she had left or seeking another exit from the cage in which she found herself caught—turned again—confronted him with a quick, piteous glance—stepped out and passed onward, with a slight inclination of a stately head as he raised his hat. Miss Higgins's man in livery, engaged for the afternoon, having opened the door, she disappeared swiftly within, leaving Bainbridge staring after.

"Going down, sir," the lift-boy was obliged to remind him before he could sufficiently collect his wits to enter and descend.

CHAPTER IV

BUT on the twenty-ninth Bainbridge saw this woman for the second time. Indeed, he found himself sitting beside her without realizing for the first half-hour who she was.

It was a large party, made up chiefly of people whom he didn't know, and he had arrived too late to be introduced to any one. From the card handed to him by the footman he understood that he was to take in Mary Galloway, and after having saluted Leslie and Maggie Palliser, his host and hostess, he sought her out. Dinner being announced at once, he had no opportunity to look about him till he was seated at the table.

Even then he was absorbed by his little neighbor on the right. She was touchingly lovely, he thought, in white without an ornament, and with only a swaying girdle of rose-pink to reflect the carmine in her cheeks. He was glad to have her there, glad to be beside her. During his years of dining out in New York this precise situation had never arisen before. It was an opportunity to know her better, to overcome the defensive of hostility or scorn she put up nervously whenever he approached her.

"I haven't seen you since the afternoon at Miss Higgins's," he began, as he unfolded his napkin. "If numbers mean anything you made her party a success."

The crystalline tinkle in her voice penetrated the up-

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roar, which in an American gathering begins with the moment of sitting down to table, with the clear sound of a silver bell. "I dare say it wasn't worth doing, but—"

"On the contrary, it seems to me well worth doing. You made her happy—"

"Yes, but happy only in the way of seeing well-known people in her little parlor."

"But she was happy just the same. That's something, isn't it?"

She trifled with her caviar. "Yes, it's something; it's what most people call snobbery."

"And what do you call it?"

"Oh, snobbery, too."

"And yet you helped her out."

"Because I couldn't see what else to do."

"Exactly; we've got to take people as they are—with their limitations. If having well-known people in her parlor is the best thing Miss Higgins knows, let us help her get it—till she sees that it isn't worth while and makes a try at something better."

She lifted to him eyes that, in spite of being soft and shy, had a sparkle of fun in them. "I'm surprised to hear *you* speak like that. I should have supposed that snobbishness would be one of the things you'd be hard on."

"If one is out for big game one can't let oneself be worried by a fly. Snobbishness is not a crime; it's a weakness—like a cast in the eye or a stutter. I don't know anything that will get the better of it more quickly than toleration and giving it what it wants."

So they talked on through the first few courses of dinner, while the defiance of her manner melted, and he himself wondered more and more if Maggie Palliser might not

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be right. He could easily imagine himself in love with Mary Galloway. He could imagine their marriage. He could foresee the whole housekeeping process as one of ease and delight, while her aid in the social side of the working of a parish would be that of a second in command no less charming than efficient. She knew that aspect of St. Mary Magdalen's better than he did himself, and after all the kindness that Doctor and Mrs. Galloway had shown him, nothing would be more fitting than that he should become their son-in-law—if he only could.

If he only could! More than once he repeated the words to himself as they talked of literature, society, and ethics, and he noticed how responsive she was to his points. It was the kind of responsiveness a man likes in a wife, with enough opposition to act as a whetstone to discussion and a fluttering common sense in yielding to conviction. It was supplementary, too, with a promise of that sex-combination which in his opinion should take the place of the sex-competition of modern argument and conflict. If he only could!—and, he reflected, there was no reason why he shouldn't. Time would accomplish it, and propinquity. It was notorious that time and propinquity were the determining factors in nine marriages out of ten. They were the product of hazards and sympathies. Between Mary Galloway and himself there might easily be more than these—if he would have patience and wait.

He found it pleasant to meditate thus, as the talk played back and forth over ethics, society, and literature, with occasional illustrations drawn from Miss Higgins's reception. At one such reference he had a sudden recollection, leading him to begin with, "Oh, and by the way—" going on to ask if she could tell him the name of a lady of

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remarkable distinction who had entered Miss Higgins's apartment just as he himself had come away from it. Miss Galloway reflected, mentioning first one and then another, each of whom he set aside in turn as already a personal acquaintance. It was not till he described the costume—the dark-brown velvet, the dark-brown plumes, shading, as he remembered them, into green at the tips, with a green lining to the coat that fell slightly open as she moved—it was not till then that Miss Galloway nodded and said, in a low voice:

"Why, that was Mrs. Gildersleeve. Don't you know her? How strange! She's just come back from abroad. She's—she's sitting next to you."

Bainbridge remembered afterward that his feeling was like that of the spectator of a play at the moment when the outer asbestos curtain begins to rise. The time of sitting and doing nothing was coming to an end. There was a sense of approaching drama in the mental air. In the action he would have a part, if only that of an impassioned looker-on.

"She's a great friend of Maggie's," Miss Galloway continued to whisper, "and I believe a kind of cousin. When I have an opportunity I'll introduce you."

He turned slightly, getting a glimpse of a thin, graceful arm resting lightly on the table, with emeralds and diamonds in the bracelet on the wrist, and emeralds and diamonds in the rings on the fingers of a slender white hand. The dress was of green and silver, in which there were shadows and shimmerings as in a woodland summer lake, while more emeralds and diamonds starred the chain that hung round the slim neck and descended below the décolletage. The dark hair was worn in a knot of the simplest fashion, but a comb with an edge of diamonds

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rose with a rim like a tiara. What he noticed in particular was the decided manner in which she turned to Endsleigh Jarrott, as if anxious to ignore himself.

"But she'll have to speak to me soon," he reflected, when Mary Galloway had been claimed by Reginald Pole, who sat on her right. With the fixed rule of dinner-party etiquette to support him, he knew he could afford to wait.

But she took no notice of his silence and isolation. All round the brilliant oval of flowers and lights, of porcelain and glass and silver, about which twenty persons were seated, there was eagerness and animation, while he was excluded from intercourse on either side. Once or twice Mary Galloway endeavored to draw him into the conversation between Reggie Pole and herself, but with little success. As a matter of fact, he preferred to sit waiting and dumb while his eyes sought the curve of the shoulder so persistently turned away, and the line which was all he could see of the carefully averted cheek.

But his reward came at last. With a sudden lull in the talk Endsleigh Jarrott spoke to the lady on his left, so that the face of which Bainbridge had not yet obtained a glimpse moved slowly into profile. It was a pure profile, high-bred and delicate, with the hair simply parted in the middle, waving over and away from the brows. Nevertheless, she continued to ignore him by smiling across the table and exchanging remarks with Harvey Colfax and Mary Pole, who sat opposite; but Miss Galloway was watching for her chance.

"Clorinda, I want you to know Mr. Bainbridge. He's a great friend of Maggie's and Leslie's."

Slowly, reluctantly, and under compulsion she turned and looked at him. He remembered afterward that her

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expression was as full of undecipherable meanings as a page of a book printed in an unknown tongue.

"So we've met at last," he said, easily.

"Yes, at last," she echoed. "I suppose it had to happen some time."

"The wonder is that it wasn't long ago."

Her reply was faint. "Yes, I suppose so."

"Leslie and Maggie speak of you so often," he laughed, "that I'd begun to think of you as a fictitious character—a sort of invisible companion such as children talk about."

The shadow in her eyes seemed to him like that which comes across a pool when a cloud passes overhead. "I've been a good deal abroad." She added, before he could respond to this, "I shouldn't have come home now if war hadn't broken out."

"Do you like it so much over there?"

"It isn't altogether a matter of liking. I've—I've other things to think of. Besides, I've lived so much in England and France that I'm at home in those countries—and in Italy."

"But more at home here?"

She evaded this question. "If I had been able to do any good I should have stayed in Paris. I wanted to. It was dreadful to be told by every one that there was nothing I could do, when so much needed to be done—and to know they were right."

"Why were they right?"

"For the reason they gave—that there was nothing I could do. I couldn't nurse or sew or undertake anything that some one else wouldn't have done better." Her voice became both eager and wistful, as she went on, "Tell me, how do people set about doing good?"

He was so absorbed in noting that quality in her face

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which was either experience or sorrow that he would have made some stupid reply if the subject hadn't been one he had long ago thought out. "By living," he answered, mechanically, as he helped himself to something, while scarcely taking his eyes from hers. "I don't know that there is any other way."

"I don't think you understand me—"

"Oh yes, I do. But people don't start out to do good as they might to take singing-lessons or do parlor tricks. You can't say I'll do good from ten to twelve on Tuesday and from two to four on Friday. Fundamentally, it isn't a question of how we act, but of what we are."

"Yes, that's like what you said before—"

"Before? When?" he asked, quickly.

She recovered herself without much display of confusion. "I've heard you preach—not often—but a few times. You said something like it then."

"Did I? Very likely. I feel rather strongly that it's something we should all understand—and that very few of us do."

The inclination of her head reminded him of nothing so much as that of a lily on its stalk. "And yet it seems to me that if you pushed that theory far enough you'd put an end to all the good work that's being done in the way of social service—"

He laughed. "Social service, as it's called, doesn't often amount to much—at least a large part of it. It's restless and mechanical and not thorough. I'm afraid it's no more than a fad of the day that will go out of fashion like other fads. I've nothing against it, further than that, in the majority of cases, it ranks with the attempt to grow plants by electric light instead of in the sunshine."

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"Then what can one do for others—?"

"Nothing that one hasn't done first of all for oneself—or tried to do. A man can't love another as himself until he has first of all learned to love himself; and he doesn't love himself until he has begun to make of himself the best thing possible."

"In that case very few people would love themselves—"

"Very few people do. What we so often put down as self-love is self-hatred, in its strict analysis. Rightly to love ourselves is a beautiful thing which leads to our rightly loving others. My point is that we can't rightly love others till we know how rightly to love ourselves."

"So that you'd say that the reason why I'm so useless is that—"

"No; wait," he laughed. "I don't say you're useless—"

"But it's what I'm telling you."

"And I don't necessarily agree. It doesn't follow that because you couldn't do war work you can't do anything at all."

"Then *what* can I do?"

"You can hardly expect me to tell you that without knowing you better. I'm speaking to you for the first time in my life—"

She interrupted, hastily: "If you could only *find* something for me to do—either in your church or elsewhere!"

"I've never seen that there was much good in that sort of thing. Believe me, the only enduring and useful work is what one does for oneself—in its extension outward. When you've got yourself ready you won't have to look far to find an opportunity; but you've got to get yourself ready first. Generally speaking, I think, we turn ourselves on to other people's needs because we don't want

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to tackle our own; and when we're driven to see the futility of that course we give up trying to do anything."

"And yet my whole object is not to think of myself at all. If I could only forget myself—"

"A plant might as well try to forget the ground, or a bird the air. Oneself is the most interesting of all subjects—and one of the most legitimate. We can get away from everything but that; and since we can't get away from it, isn't it wise to make the best and the most of it?"

He was sorry that just at this minute Endsleigh Jarrott's good-natured red face could be seen peeping round her shoulder, with the question as to whether Mrs. Gildersleeve had heard what had happened to his big machine when driven by a drunken chauffeur. Bainbridge listened to part of this adventure in the hope of recapturing his companion, but as the minutes went by without any such result he found himself forced back again on the society of Miss Galloway. With a pang he recorded the fact that his feeling at the change was like that of a man who returns to the humdrum of home after a strange and exciting journey.

During the rest of dinner he talked little. He went so far as to drag in Reggie Pole, so as to keep Mary Galloway engaged while he should be free to follow his own thoughts. He wanted to register his impressions of the last ten or fifteen minutes, to engrave them on his memory as ancient historians cut their inscriptions on rock.

Without making the admission in so many words he felt this meeting to be one of the three or four notable events in his experience. It was to nothing said or done that this conviction was due, but to causes over and above his power of analysis. With no one else whom he had

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ever met in the common ways of social life had he gone so directly to the subjects that formed his chief preoccupation. She had a need to discuss them similar to his own. She had a need to make use of them, too, though she was without a knowledge of their rules and principles. While it might be his part to help her to this knowledge, he was already aware dimly that his interest in her was essentially elementary and personal.

Beyond intermittent remarks on trivial things he had no further speech with her till the ladies rose. Even then it was not he who spoke to her; it was she who spoke to him, turning as he drew back her chair.

"I've been so glad to meet you. You've given me ideas that are new to me; but I don't understand them all. Perhaps some day we can have another talk." She smiled, too, a dim, far-away smile that was less on the lips than in her unquiet eyes. As if with an afterthought, she held out her hand. "I do hope we shall meet again."

Mary Galloway also smiled, but he was so absorbed in watching the other woman's swan-like movements as she joined the defile of ladies, most of them in sweeping trains, that he scarcely noticed it.

In the smoking-room he tried to attach himself to Leslie Palliser in order to talk of the new acquaintance he had been privileged to make. But Leslie, who wasn't smoking himself, dodged about with a box of cigars in one hand and one of cigarettes in the other in such a way that it was impossible to nail him down.

"Oh, Clorinda Gildersleeve," he responded, absently, when Bainbridge detained him a minute to force the subject. "Yes, yes. . . . Saw that Maggie had put you next to her. . . . Mighty nice woman. . . . Yes, yes."

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"She struck me as more than that," Bainbridge declared, in the hope of provoking discussion.

But Leslie's lack of interest was apparent even when he said: "Oh, certainly. . . . Quite remarkable woman. . . . Great friend of ours. . . . Wonder you'd never met her before. . . . Lives abroad a good deal. . . . See?"

In the end Bainbridge found himself wedged in between Endsleigh Jarrott and Rodney Wrenn, listening vaguely to the latter's account of how his mare had been stricken with the staggers, while he watched Leslie's restless movements about the room and wondered what ailed him.

In many ways Leslie Palliser was his most intimate friend, certainly his most intimate friend in New York. They were nearly enough of an age to have known each other at Harvard, where Leslie had been a senior the year when Bainbridge had entered as freshman. Indeed, it had been Palliser's respect for the younger man, with whom he had maintained a touch-and-go acquaintance through the years subsequent to the university, that had induced Dr. Galloway to look toward Boston when in need of an assistant. Leslie's own interest in St. Mary Magdalen's, where he was now a member of the vestry, had begun on his marriage to masterful Maggie Endsleigh, whose family had long been ardent in the parish.

There were people who wondered why Maggie had taken him, and others who marveled that he should have married her. To Bainbridge, on the contrary, they seemed made for each other, if for no other reason than their differences. Leslie had all the outer, exquisite finish his wife had not, with a dreamy, elusive quality which might have been the mark of a poet rather than of a writer on political economy, as he actually was.

If there was a fault to be found with him on physical

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grounds, it was that he was too perfect. A man had no business to be so handsome. It made him look, so Bainbridge chaffed him, like a figurine. The features might have been modeled in porcelain; in the sweep and upward curve of the fair mustache one rarely saw a hair displaced; in the droop of the long eyelashes over romantic gray eyes there was languor and poetry and passion, with all the emotional suggestions that set women's hearts a-beating and stir men's scorn. Evening dress fitted him as bark fits its stem, and his cravat seemed to bloom on him with the elegance of an orchid. When he lectured before business men's clubs, as he often did, and did ably, they said it was like hearing economic statistics and forecasts of new routes of trade from the lips of a Watteau shepherd or a *jeune premier*.

“Poor Leslie! Don't you think his good looks are a burden to him? He tries so hard to be taken seriously, and my husband says that he has just as much chance as a canary to be taken for a crane. What do *you* say?”

Mrs. Endsleigh Jarrott asked the question, as she asked all questions, as if it were a burning one, and Bainbridge the only authority in the world who could deal with it. They were seated now in the music-room, where Leslie was playing a sonatina by Ravel, and had paused in the interval between two movements. Bainbridge was sorry to have to speak, for the doing so broke the spell of strange dreams into which the strange harmonies had thrown him. Since it was necessary to respond, he merely said:

“He seems to bear up under it.”

“Yes, *he* bears up,” the lady declared, quickly, “perhaps better than poor Maggie does.”

As Leslie ceased speaking to Mary Galloway, who was

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sitting near the piano, and began on the minuet, it was impossible to say more; but Mrs. Jarrott's last words gave for an instant a new direction to Bainbridge's thoughts. In reality she was the one of his parishoners of whom he was somewhat afraid. He had sat down beside her not from choice, but because on the entry of the men she had beckoned to him and made room on a settee against the wall. A Juno in white satin, with a skin which at forty-five was still as rich and as even as cream, she had a manner of appealing to any man who happened to be near her as if she hung on his opinion. Bainbridge had noticed in his own case that if she hung on his opinion it was in a way to involve it with hers, and often to impart a sense of indorsing some subtle calumny.

But with the renewal of the strange harmonies he passed again into his strange dreams, especially as he had Clorinda Gildersleeve directly in his line of vision. Seated in a low chair almost in the center of the room, fanning herself slowly, her train shimmering about her feet, she stirred his imagination to the new questions, to the new relation of men and women to each other and to the world, of which this new music was in some sense the voice. In it emotion was intermingled with interrogation, and passion was restrained by sheer consciousness of itself. It was as far from the triumphant self-assurance of the nineteenth century as from the melodic sentiment of the eighteenth, and was perhaps nearer to life than either because of being more inarticulate, more troubled, more tortured, more eager for the basic and the ultimate. As Palliser played with a dreamy abandonment that made itself felt in the way his slim silhouette leaned back from the piano, while his eyes sought the cornice of the room as if looking into far spiritually peopled spaces, the tones

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wove themselves in with Bainbridge's hopes and wonderings and desires and became their speech.

It was with something of a shock that in the next interval he heard Mrs. Jarrott say, eagerly: "What do *you* think? Wouldn't you simply hate it if you were in Maggie's place?"

He looked blank. "Simply hate it? Why?"

"Oh, don't tell me you don't know. If I had a husband like that, with every third woman in New York throwing herself at his head, my hair would have turned gray long ago."

"But you haven't a husband like that," he managed to say, as with a pang of envy he watched Harvey Colfax saunter up to Mrs. Gildersleeve for an exchange of joking remarks.

"No, thank God! And I sometimes fancy that dear Maggie wishes she could say the same. What do *you* think?"

The subject was new to Bainbridge, and slightly disturbing. "I've never thought anything about it—"

"Well, I would if I were you. You see so much of them both—"

"That's just it; and I've never had the slightest reason to suspect—"

"Oh, men never do suspect till the thing is right under their noses," she declared, passionately. "It isn't what one sees, it's what one knows."

"Do you know anything in particular?"

She drew herself up with dramatic haughtiness. "Do you think I'd betray it if I did? I'm not talking scandal—to you of all people. I only want to be reassured."

"If you want me to tell you that Leslie and Maggie are perfectly happy—"

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"I want you to tell me they're not putting up a bluff."

"They're not as far as I can see. I've never thought of such a thing."

She sighed and smiled as if playing to a gallery, rolling her tiny, brilliant eyes. "Then I'm *so* relieved. You know if any one would; though I don't suppose that any one *can* know beyond all doubt. What do *you* think? Can Maggie expect to hold a man like that—?"

"Isn't it a sufficient answer that she does?"

She seemed to tear at her heart. "Ah, but does she? Tell me frankly, now. You'd know if any one would, and I want your real opinion. If you'd seen the way they were married! Dear Maggie, with her will and her size and her money, simply swooped down on him, like a typhoon on a schooner, and swallowed him up. Poor Leslie was wooed and married and a'—before he knew what he was about. He hadn't a penny—as I suppose you know. Dear Maggie swept him off his feet; but whether she'll keep him off them, now that he's got more of a position in the world, is another matter. What do *you* say?"

He found himself relieved of the necessity of answering this question by the fact that Leslie again stretched out his arms to the keyboard, and with head thrown back, and that air of searching vague, spiritual places, began on the last movement. But the strange harmonies now stirred Bainbridge's imagination to a new variety of strange thoughts. Without crediting Mrs. Jarrott's insinuations, or attaching to them more importance than they deserved, he found it difficult to dismiss them. When, therefore, he sat alone with Leslie and Maggie, after the other guests had gone, he looked at both with

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a wonder for which the word suspicion was scarcely too harsh a term.

They were still in the music-room, where Leslie had returned to the piano-seat, after escorting the last of the ladies to the door. Mrs. Palliser and Bainbridge had already dropped into two of the comfortable chairs grouped carelessly near the instrument.

"What do you think of Clorinda?" she had asked, at once.

He had answered, truthfully, "I thought her wonderful."

"Wonderful in what way?"

"Oh, in every way. She's so—so amazing."

It was then that Palliser came back from his task as host, catching the last words. "Who's amazing?" He put the question sharply and nervously, and yet with a metallic laugh. Slipping into the piano-seat, he struck a loud, harsh chord or two, before adding, "Who's Arthur raving about now?"

"Clorinda. I put him next to her."

Palliser sounded out a few more chords, breaking into a snatch from "Tristan".

"I'm not raving about her," Bainbridge protested; "but I found her unusual."

"That's why I wanted you to know her," Mrs. Palliser explained. "If Mary Galloway won't do—"

Palliser snatched his hands from the keyboard and turned fiercely. "For God's sake, Maggie, let Arthur manage his own affairs."

"That's what I want him to do—with a little directing."

"Can't he direct them himself?"

Her loud, frank laugh was the more boisterous because

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of her irritation in being called to account. "Can you, Arthur? Do you want me to drop out?"

Palliser's hands strayed into the fire-music. "What on earth can he say? Do you expect him to tell you to mind your own business?" The leaping, crackling quality of the phrases he seemed to whip out of the piano rendered only the more nervous the laugh by which he tried to tone down the annoyance in his words.

Warned by the flash in his hostess's eye, Bainbridge sprang to his feet, saying, as he did so: "Maggie is minding her own business when she's minding mine. Aren't you, Maggie? It will be a pretty cold day when I don't turn to you as a constitutional monarch to his prime minister." Going forward, he leaned on the piano, where Palliser was now running into something else. "What's that squizzling thing you're playing, Leslie?"

Palliser said it was Debussy's "Reflet dans l'eau."

Bainbridge looked round at his hostess, but shook his head sidewise in the direction of his friend. "What's the matter with him? He's been like that all the evening."

Rising also, Mrs. Palliser went forward. Above her evening dress of pale-blue silk her face was unusually florid, but the impulse to anger had passed. Standing slightly behind her husband, she brushed her hand lightly over his head. "Poor dear," she said, softly; "it's Clorinda. He doesn't like her."

"Doesn't like her?" Bainbridge demanded, quickly. "Why not?"

She had got back her noisy, jolly voice. "Oh, you must ask him that. I don't know." She bent till her red cheek touched his hair, while she murmured, tenderly, "All I see is that whenever she's round he's cross and

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naughty, and wants to say horrid things to his poor old mumsey-wumsey wife, who adores him."

While his right hand continued to find the keys Paliser raised his left, and, drawing up the fingers that rested on his shoulder, he touched them with his lips. And yet it seemed to Bainbridge that the romantic eyes continued to search the dimness about the cornice of the room as if seeking the things that were realities.

CHAPTER V

"CLORINDA would have been different if she had ever been in love. She's one of those women who have always been able to pick and choose, and so has got herself bewildered by the *embarras de richesses*."

Bainbridge's heart gave a great bound. It was something to know that no one else had ever had a chance, even though there would be none for him. He had reached a point in his acquaintance with Clorinda Gildersleeve where the reckoning of chances had become important.

It was after the Sunday-night supper, which he so often took with Leslie and Maggie Palliser. Tired and contented with his day's work, he was ready to relax and be confidential. Leslie having disappeared from the richly somber, dimly lighted library, and the children being tucked into bed, the minute was favorable to that intimate talk by which a man and a woman who have an unsentimental friendship for each other can come to something that resembles the free intercommunion of spirits. Bainbridge understood Mrs. Palliser in both her virtues and her limitations. He understood her as honest and kind, even when wilful and imperious. With her interest in his own life he had a friendly forbearance, since he knew it to be inspired by good will.

"How do you know she's never been in love?" he ven-

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tured to ask, his eyes gazing into the heart of the spluttering fire.

"Because I do. I know all about her. She couldn't have been in love without my seeing it."

"She's been married."

"That didn't count. She was very sweet with poor old Martin Gildersleeve; but he was nearly sixty when she wasn't twenty-one. That was her mother—old Mrs. Rintoul. Clorinda was one of those dreamy girls who develop late. She just walked through the marriage, as you might say, and hardly knew where she was till she was out on the other side. Since then—"

"Yes, since then—what?"

"Oh, well, she's been waking up. I can't describe her in any other way. She's trying to find herself; and she's just as much at sixes and sevens as if she was Galatea come to life at the age of thirty-one."

For some minutes Bainbridge puffed at his cigar in silence. "She always seems to me," he said then, "as if she was—as if she was hiding something." Startled by his own words, he was nevertheless relieved that Maggie should agree with him.

"Yes, she does. But she isn't. She has nothing to hide. She couldn't have without my seeing it. There's nothing behind that air of mystery but herself."

"Do you mean that she herself is a mystery?"

"Only in the sense that she's a woman who has never had a woman's chief experience."

"Because she's never been in love? But then she might have been," he persisted, for the sake of being contradicted again, "without having told you anything about it."

She shook her head. "I shouldn't want her to tell me.

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"I should have known." She added, with seeming irrelevance, "I don't see as much of her as I could wish, because Leslie doesn't like her."

He raised his head with curiosity. "So you said the other night, but I can hardly imagine it. Why on earth shouldn't he like her?"

"Perhaps because she doesn't like him. I've noticed that, too. They *used* to be very good friends; but now they never speak to each other unless they can't help it."

Bainbridge allowed this to pass. "She was in church this afternoon."

"That's another thing about her—she's never had any religion. Neither had old Mrs. Rintoul; neither had Martin Gildersleeve. They've all been pagans, of the respectable American brand that's the most godless type of all. I don't believe Clorinda has been in a church twenty times in her life."

"I've seen her at St. Mary Magdalen's occasionally, on a Sunday afternoon."

"Oh, that's not church; that's you. She goes to hear you preach. I know you interest her; but you're a long way from having converted her yet."

"The question of conversion," he answered, rather hotly, "hasn't entered my mind, and I doubt if it has entered hers. I haven't met her a dozen times in all—and then more or less by chance."

"Oh, don't defend yourself. There's no harm in your trying to convert her, and there may be some good. It will be like taming a wild bird; but even that has been done."

"And yet you yourself—"

"Brought you together—yes—for the reason that I want you to have the privilege of choice. I don't think

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you should rush in headlong and marry Mary Galloway without seeing that there are other types of women in the world."

He smiled. "Have I shown any signs of rushing in headlong—?"

"My dear man, I don't wait till you show signs of things. My part is to anticipate. If I hadn't recommended Mary, to begin with, I don't believe you'd ever have given her a second thought."

"How do you know I have, as it is?"

"By my common sense. Now that I've pointed her out, you can't help seeing that she's ideally the wife for you. No one else will ever be as good."

"And yet—"

"Yes; Clorinda again. But, don't you see, you can never get the true value of anything unless you have a standard of comparison? Clorinda throws Mary into relief; Mary does the same for Clorinda. If you marry the one she'll be happy with you; if you marry the other you'll be happy with her. There's your range of choice, and it's pretty good whichever way you take it."

"Yes, but with a big *if*."

"There's an *if* in everything till you get it out. That's what remains for you to do."

He reflected on this. "You say that one of them would be happy with me. Which would that be?"

"That's something for you to find out. I sha'n't tell you. If I did, you're the sort of man who'd go straight and propose to her. In all marriages one is happier than the other, and that you can take from me."

As Bainbridge said no more, silence fell till they began to speak of the meeting of a board of directors of a chari-

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table institution which was to be held at the Palliser residence on a day in the week that had just begun. Into this desultory discussion Maggie burst with the words, which she seemed to utter against her will:

"What would you say to a woman who was afraid her husband wasn't in love with her any' more?"

At the queer note in her voice Bainbridge looked up from his contemplation of the fire. "I'd tell her not to be."

"Not to be what?"

"Not to be afraid. Where people are as intimate as husband and wife, love is subject to all kinds of suggestion."

"But if she can't help it?"

"She *can* help it—by loving enough for two."

"She might love enough for three, or for thirty, and not get back—"

His eyes returned to the fire. He spoke slowly. "The right kind of love is the most sure and most patient force in human life. Tell your—your friend to keep on loving, and neither to probe love with questions nor torment herself with fears. The chances are that she'll work out, or work back, into happiness for them both."

There was something not far from a sob in her big voice as she said: "You're wonderful, Arthur—for a man who's never been in love himself."

"Oh, but I have been," he answered, quietly. "I've meant to tell you about it sometime. I'll do it now, if you like."

It was a simple story, which he told simply. He had met during his last year at Harvard a girl whom he had wanted to marry, but who had married some one else. That was all. She had refused him without knowing how

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hard it had gone with him, and now on the rare occasions when he saw her they were still good friends.

"So that it *didn't* work out into happiness—" she began to object.

"Oh yes, it did—because it showed me the direction in which my happiness was to lie. It suggested its own consolation; and the consolation led me into the Church. I'd meant to be a lawyer before that."

"I'm very glad you didn't become one," she exclaimed, with a sort of weary heartiness. "There are plenty of good lawyers; but there are not many clergymen like you. I'll remember what you've said about not probing love with questions or tormenting oneself with fears. It's pretty hard at times—"

He broke in on another of the convulsive gasps that were nearly sobs by saying: "Old John Keble speaks of love as 'the flower that closes up for fear'; and it certainly won't grow if we keep pulling it up by the roots to see how it's getting along. It 'll do best when we water it with trust rather than with suspicion, and keep our own love as true and sure as possible."

As Leslie strolled back into the room they began again, rather consciously, to talk of the meeting to be held on the following Wednesday afternoon; but Bainbridge was surprised, as he said good night, at the vigor with which Maggie's strong hand clasped his, and more so when she said, in a low, husky voice, "God bless you, Arthur!" at a moment when her husband's back was turned.

But he walked home in a sort of waking trance. Clorinda Gildersleeve had never been in love before! The information was startling. It brought her nearer to him; it made her almost accessible; it removed the haunting dread he had carried away from each meeting

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with her that there was something in her experience that made her different from other women—something tragic, or remorseful, or broken-hearted, that put her beyond his reach. She was beyond his reach in any case; he knew that, of course! A woman of her position and freedom—a woman who carried with her an air of charm and wonderment that might have gone with some legendary princess, or some heroine of poetic history—would never become the wife of a commonplace working clergyman in a city like New York. But it didn't do away with the fact that he loved her, or make his love one shade less a glorious, noble, exhilarating thing.

He had never said to himself that he loved her before this minute. He did it as he turned out of Sixty-ninth Street to go down Fifth Avenue, and caught the red-yellow glow thrown up by the city and resting on it like an aureole. There was a magic in this splendor akin to what he felt within. It was luminous and mighty; it was beautifying, transforming, tremendous; it was the radiance that turns the ugly into loveliness and broods and soothes and uplifts. It spread itself above spire and tower and cube like incense ascending, like strength coming down. "Every good gift," he quoted to himself, "and every perfect gift, cometh down from the Father of Lights." In the very quotation he reached the conclusion that, come what might, and no matter what should be the result, it was for him part of that highest possible which he had always made his aim, that he should love Clorinda Gildersleeve.

The Father of Lights! He uttered the exclamation joyously under his breath as he descended the long slope, with lights flaring before him, above him, and on either side. In long double lines they trailed off into what

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seemed like the infinite distance of the lower stretches of the city; they twinkled through the trees on his right; they threw out broad shafts from the doorways on his left; they banked themselves in stupendous masses and rows, high up and sky-like, in the hotels and apartment-houses south of the Park. It was not like a wonderland; it was like the great heart of the world, the heart of the human race, the heart that is all fire and passion and love, gazing through wide-open eyes, looking out, looking on, while he entered into his heritage. The Father of Lights! Every good gift and every perfect gift came down, could only come down, from Him; so that Bainbridge took his love as a boon.

He dreamed of it that night. In the morning he looked over his cards of invitation to see if he was asked to any houses where he might possibly meet Mrs. Gildersleeve. He went to the Cloudsleys', where a daughter was being brought out; but Clorinda wasn't there, and his day grew somber. It gave him, however, a feeling that his time had not been wholly thrown away when he had a talk with Miss Higgins over a matter which he deemed of some importance.

He had noticed her almost from the moment of his entrance into the great Cloudsley drawing-room, chiefly because of the way in which she verified Maggie Palliser's description given to him two months earlier. She was standing in a corner, gaunt and grimacing, in spite of a dashing, fashionable hat and a trim, tailor-made suit of gray. His eyes sought her at intervals for the reason that she exercised on him a sort of fascination. He found her at once pitiful in her isolation and sinister in the kind of watchfulness with which her small, cold, smiling eyes roamed about the company. Feeling it his duty to

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speak to her, if for no other reason than that she was a parishioner, he found himself greeted with the over-emphasis of welcome which his former meetings with her had led him to expect.

And yet when it came to actual conversation he was obliged somewhat to revise his opinions and put aside his antipathies. Indeed, she plunged into a subject that would have interested any clergyman, and Bainbridge more than most, without undue loss of time.

"Oh, Mr. Bainbridge, I've been most anxious to meet you. I want to consult you about a young girl. She's been a little servant of mine— Oh, the tiniest kind of maid—and I never have more than one—my means will not permit it! But Pansy was such a sweet little thing, and devoted to me—simply devoted—I never should have suspected her of moral delinquency."

With this as a preamble his interest was assured in such a way that he forgot to keep more than a desultory watch for Clorinda Gildersleeve.

The story was of the kind which never fails to be absorbing, even though he had heard it in varying forms ever since the beginning of his work. Pansy Wilde was the eldest daughter of a poor, respectable widow who went out to work to maintain her three children. The family had become known to Miss Higgins when the father, the janitor of the apartment-house in which she lived, had died. After giving occasional help to the mother, Miss Higgins had taken Pansy, at the age of fifteen, as a regular member of her establishment. That had been two years earlier, and though in the mean time Pansy's experiences had been such as to preclude further waiting on her patroness, Miss Higgins's interest in the girl had not been relaxed. The trouble was to know what

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to do, since Pansy had shown a tendency to be a law unto herself.

"And I have to be so careful, in my position, living alone," Miss Higgins explained, modestly. Her eyes fell. "It was—it was a man, you understand—a man—and then poor Pansy had—well, I can only call it by its right name—Pansy had—a child. She's run away from home—and refuses to give her mother the name of the child's father—and I don't know what other dreadful things may not happen to her. If there was only some place where the poor girl could be put—and taught something—that's what I say—taught something. The trouble with our lower classes is that they're so helpless—there are so few things that they can do—even if they're paid for it. And poor little Pansy now—she wasn't bad—not naturally. She was just young and pretty and dissatisfied—unsatisfied, as you might say—and this is New York—and there you are! Oh, Mr. Bainbridge, if you only knew of some place where they'd take her—if we can find out where she is—and if she isn't *too* far gone to be tided over this wilful period in her life. . . ."

Bainbridge found his respect for Miss Higgins increasing, and his suspicions, in as far as they were suspicions, melting away. It was precisely the sort of instance that touched him. Moreover, he knew of just the right institution for Pansy Wilde, if her mother would intrust her to its care. Yes, it was an institution—the world had not outlived that kind of mechanical solicitude yet; but it was an old foundation for New York, dating, that was, from the eighteenth century, and very well managed and endowed. He himself was a member of the board of directors, of whom there was to be a meeting that very week. In the mean time he would send

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Miss Merry, the deaconess who worked on such cases for St. Mary Magdalen's, to see the mother and consult with her. After putting down the address in his notebook, he took leave of Miss Higgins with a warmth that won her heart, and was due to the fact that he had previously been unjust to her.

He roamed again about the reception-rooms, greeting an acquaintance here and there, exchanging a word or two with Mary Galloway, with Maggie Palliser, with Mrs. Enisleigh Jarrott, and nodding to Leslie from a distance. Not till it became evident that Clorinda wouldn't come did he take his departure.

On Tuesday, there being no such event, he was tempted to call on her, and actually, as the lamps were being lit, strolled by her house; but motives of discretion, of fear of being misinterpreted, kept him from going in. Again that night he dreamed of her, wildly and feverishly, making up his mind that he would call on her next day, however serious the mistake. During the two months he had known her she had so pointedly refrained from asking him to come that to do so required some temerity, and called on him to run a risk. Very well; he would run it. It might be—it was no more on his part than a mad hope which there was nothing, or almost nothing, to justify—but it might be that she wanted to see him so much that she dared not ask him to come.

But on Wednesday morning he remembered the meeting at Maggie Palliser's, which would take place at just the moment when he might expect to find Clorinda at home. His spirits were dashed again, much as those of a boy whose holiday has been postponed. On Thursday his engagements would render it impossible for him to make the call, and this would also be the case on

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Friday. The week might go by without his seeing her, and so might another week. He wondered why his points of contact with her should be so few, when he could meet almost any one else at any time he chose. Did she avoid him? He could have brought himself to think so, had it not been for a certain kind of pleasure—a something that was not far removed from joy—she betrayed each time of seeing him.

Gloomily making up his mind to his disappointment, he was attempting the second best by going early to his meeting, on the chance of a half-hour with Maggie Paliser, which might be spent in a renewal of confidential talk. Suddenly, as he turned from Fifth Avenue into Sixty-ninth Street, he felt a kind of inner faintness. At sight of a tall, distinguished figure descending from a motor that drew up at Maggie's door he stood stock still. Clorinda spoke to the chauffeur and dismissed him. The machine was already moving eastward along the street and she was ringing at the door before Bainbridge could take the few necessary steps and join her.

Not having noticed his approach, she turned with a quick, startled flush at sound of his voice. In her eyes, too, there was a misty look of terror which cleared, almost before one could notice it, into reassurance and welcome. It was her customary greeting. He could not remember that he had ever come near her without seeing that swift preliminary token of fear, which flashed out as quickly as it flashed in, as her acknowledgment of his presence. It had been so at their first meeting, and continued to be so still. It preceded her smile, and the way she had of holding out her hand—a way that was at once timid and frank, lofty, gracious, and condescending, and yet seemingly half afraid.

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"Are you going in to see Maggie?"

He felt that her words were merely on the surface; the realities between them were in their flushes, in their eyes, in obscure emotions for which no language had as yet been coined. He replied, mechanically, "I'm going to the meeting."

She started again. "The meeting? What meeting?"

He explained.

"Then I shall not go in." She said so to the footman who answered her ring. She had come about nothing—just to see Mrs. Palliser and have a cup of tea—but she would return another day.

Bainbridge endeavored to persuade her; they had plenty of time; the meeting would not begin for another half-hour; he himself had come early.

But she began to move away from the door. "No, no; I shall go home—or somewhere else. I shall walk down the Avenue. It will do me good. I love walking on these crisp afternoons. That's why I sent away the motor. I meant to walk in any case. Do give my love to Maggie, and say I didn't want to see her about anything important. I was just a little—just a little lonely, and I thought I should like a chat."

With that inclination of the head which he always compared to the bend of a lily on its stalk she was about to leave him when he took his courage in both hands. "Then mayn't I walk a little with you? I'm too early for the meeting, and Maggie will only be bored by having to entertain me. I'd much rather go down the Avenue with you—if you'll only let me."

"Why, of course—if you like."

Again he knew her words were only surface words. What she really meant was written in the flashing, un-

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decipherable language of her face. That was something to which he had no key. Displeasure was not in it so much as misgiving, and misgiving not so much as a tremulous acquiescence. That this exquisite being, whom he could scarcely approach without a sense of reverence and awe, should give him the permission for which he asked, not carelessly or indifferently, but with something like emotion on her own part, swept him upward into regions such as he had never before dreamt of.

When they were actually side by side, walking toward Fifth Avenue, he found himself with nothing to say. The situation had changed so rapidly that he was at a loss not merely for language, but for thought. And yet outward conditions were so photographed on his faculties as to make the moment memorable. He saw everything, though he seemed to be taking note of nothing. He saw the double rush of motors, swinging from and into the Avenue, twisting before and behind one another, seemingly in danger of collision, but veering off to marvelous escapes. He saw the same stream in the distance, up and down Fifth Avenue itself, continuous, continuous, like a river flowing two ways at once, and giving out a low, monotonous rumble. He saw the flare of a red winter sunset at the end of the street, over the trees of the Park—the descent of darkness through the air—the occasional lighting of a lamp. He saw the homing of sparrows to their perches, and heard the warbling twitter that preceded their settling for the night. He saw the pedestrians who went by—a butler, smooth-shaven and smug, a lady in rich furs, a nurse-maid with three children, a boy with a bundle of packages, another who threw the evening papers into doorways, two smartly dressed girls of the neighborhood, a negro, a tramp. All these impressions registered them-

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selves swiftly and subconsciously during the minutes—it might have been only seconds, though the time seemed long—in which he was without the capacity for speech.

His mind came back actively to Clorinda last of all, for it was only last of all that he dared again to look at her. She wore the same brown velvet, with the same brown plumes shading into green, as on the day when she had confronted him in the lift. The muff was of sable, while a broad sable stole, of which an end was thrown over her left shoulder, emphasized the slender distinction of her figure as she walked. As she walked, too, there were glimpses of green, where the lining of the coat was flung outward.

It was she who spoke first, doing so before they reached Fifth Avenue. "What sort of a meeting are you going to have? Something connected with your church?"

It relieved what he felt as the almost unbearable tension in his heart to be able to answer a commonplace question in a commonplace way. It was nothing connected with the church, though it was something philanthropic. The meeting was to be at Maggie's because most of the directors lived in that neighborhood, and her house was a well-known headquarters of good works.

"What sort of good works is this?"

He continued to explain. In the late seventeen hundreds some worthy citizens of New York had founded a home for incorrigible girls, and attached to it a piece of property at that time of small value, but now in the heart of the city. Its rental was sufficient to take care of the thirty girls, to which number at any one time they were limited, in such a way that they could be taught to earn a living, to respect themselves, and come out at the end of two or three years as useful members of the community.

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Some of them went back to an irregular life, but about eighty per cent. remained true to the training they had received, generally marrying and settling down.

"Poor things! And what makes them go wrong in the first place? Is it that they"—she seemed to find some difficulty in formulating her question—"is it that they fall in love?"

"Not generally—not often. Love, as a matter of fact, has very little to do with it. They're too young, as a rule, to know anything about it, beyond some sort of vague romantic dream."

She walked on, without looking at him. "Then what is it?"

"Bad homes—bad parents—bad examples—loneliness often—poverty always—"

"So that it isn't really their fault."

"Not primarily. It is their fault in the second place, since you can't take responsibility away from any human individual; and yet—"

"And yet you can't blame them much, can you?"

"I don't believe we think about the blame. We're too busy finding the cure to dwell on the way the patients have caught the disease."

"And what cure do you find?"

"One cure is work. It often happens that girls go wrong from sheer lack of anything to do in which they can take an interest. Once you've given them intelligent occupation, it's astonishing what a change comes over some of them."

The warmth with which she spoke took him by surprise. "I don't see that it's astonishing. If you only knew what it is *not* to have intelligent occupation—"

He was moved to ask, "Do you?"



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She shot him a sidewise glance in answering. "I've never had it and I hardly expect to have it—now."

"Why do you emphasize the now?"

"Because if I ever had any such hope you've taken it away."

"I?" The knowledge that he counted for anything in her life brought an element of joy into his amazement.

"I had thought I might do something," she declared, in a tone of reproach, "till you told me I couldn't."

"Told you you couldn't? When?"

"That evening at dinner, at Maggie's. You said that till one had done impossible things for oneself one couldn't do anything for any one else."

"Did I say impossible things?"

"They're impossible to me."

"How do you know, if you haven't tried them?"

"I have tried them. It's the bringing every thought into captivity—that's the expression, isn't it?"

"Did I ever tell *you* to do that?"

In some confusion she stopped short before a flower-shop near the corner of Fifty-ninth Street. "How beautiful!" she said, rather tremblingly. "Things are already brightening up for Christmas. It seems terrible for us to be enjoying ourselves, doesn't it? when there's so much misery in the trenches." The digression enabled her to regain the necessary tone, as they walked on again. "If you haven't said it in so many words, it's what I've inferred. I've heard you preach a good many times—"

He accepted the explanation. "Even so, it's not anything that can be accomplished easily or all at once. It's a life-work."

Having to run counter to the up-current of the city's life, they were separated for a minute or two, which gave

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her time to think over these words. When they had again come together she turned on him suddenly with a fierceness which he had only suspected as an element in her character. "How should you feel if the most serious thing you ever had to think about was dress?"

He laughed. "I suppose I should feel like a man who has neither legs nor arms; but that can't be your situation."

"It is—almost."

"Oh, but only—almost. That lets you out, doesn't it?"

"No, because—" She hesitated long, pausing again before a convenient bookshop in a way that made him also pause. He noticed that, for the first time since he had known her, her eyes, which were darker than hazel and deep with a baffling profundity, looked straight into his own. He knew she wanted to tell him something, to make a confession; but he knew, too, that she would make it only in suggestion, leaving him to draw his own conclusions. "No," she repeated, "because the only serious thing I have to think about I don't think about any more. . . . I shut my mind to it. . . . It's no use. . . . I've thought about it so much . . . and so helplessly . . . and always round and round in a circle . . . that now . . . At least," she went on, in another tone, "it would be *quite* useless . . . my thinking about it . . . if it weren't for . . . some of the things you said."

Before he could group these broken phrases together, or bring out of them anything like coherent sense, she had hastened on again in such a way that the crowd divided them once more.

Though there were but a few paces between them he made no effort to rejoin her till he had pondered on

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what she had said. The inference was plain. It was what he had suspected. Maggie Palliser was wrong in saying Clorinda had never been in love. She had been in love—and unhappily. That was what he had seen in her from the first; it was the something heartbroken, the secret, which was not quite a secret, she had been trying to conceal. And yet the truth had scarcely come home to him before he found himself tingling in every nerve at the discovery that she wanted him to know it.

He had allowed her to keep a step or two . . . advance of him, while a flying wedge of pedestrians intervened between them. She walked so swiftly as to give the impression of a person in flight. She might have been trying to run away from him, or from something in her thought. When he was again beside her, she spoke rapidly and without looking round.

"I wonder if you have any idea as to what I mean?"

"I can guess," he returned, quietly. He felt himself privileged to add, "I rather think I saw it from the first."

She seemed to quicken her pace. "I thought you did. From that very night at Maggie's I was sure you could see right through me." Before he could take these words up in any way, she said, breathlessly: "I'm glad. It's the more kind of you to treat me as you have. I—I shall never forget it."

He allowed himself to say, as if speaking casually, "It's been the most wonderful thing in my life to know you at all."

She gave no indication of having heard these words, going on to say, with the rapidity of subdued excitement: "But I've lived through it now. . . . I've lived some of it down . . . not all of it . . . some of it only . . . and if you could go on helping me . . ."

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"If I've helped you in any way—"

"You've helped me in more ways than you can know anything about; and now if I could only *do* something . . . get out of myself . . ."

"Well, you shall."

"These poor girls, for example. . . . Don't you see? . . . If I could do anything for them . . . however little . . ."

He thought it tactful to follow the lead with which she glided away from her own deeper experience to something in the nature of a consequence. "How should you like to come and see them? You might be interested."

"Oh, if I might!"

"It isn't that they're on show, or anything of that kind." He reflected for a few seconds before making his next suggestion. "I go to talk to them every few weeks. Perhaps you might care to come then. Maggie is sometimes there, or one or another of the women directors; and they have a sort of tea with the girls afterward, for the purpose of getting to know them. They'll probably be afraid of you at first."

"Not half as much as I shall be afraid of them."

"But you'll get used to one another; and then you'll see how slight is the difference between them and oneself."

"Oh, but I see that now," she exclaimed, with what was almost fervor. "I'm ready—ready to learn from them . . ."

One does learn from them—at least I do. They're very touching, in their way, with an innocence that persists in spite of everything. You see they're all under twenty; and just at present the oldest is not more than nineteen."

So they passed from the personal topic to the more

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general, and after crossing Forty-second Street they scarcely spoke at all. At Thirty-ninth Street they turned toward Madison Avenue, stopping before one of the smaller houses on the slope of Murray Hill. As it was nearly dark by this time, the outer vestibule, into which they could see through a glass door protected by a wrought-iron grille, was lighted up. It was a white vestibule that seemed the more spotless because of the strip of red carpet running up the steps, and the two pointed box-trees in tubs in the corners. Bainbridge had often, as he went by, looked at it enviously. It seemed a fitting threshold to mark the home of one so exquisite, so simple, so fastidious, so pure, so much the soul in search of the higher things while remaining a woman of the world. At the same time it was like a barrier which he had still to pass. Others went in and out over it for whom it had no meaning. For him it *had* a meaning; perhaps it had a meaning, too, for her. He guessed this when in bidding him good-by she said: "I can't ask you to come in, because you'll be late for your meeting. I'm afraid you'll be late as it is—" and yet refrained from asking him to come on any subsequent occasion.

"But it can't be because she doesn't want me," he declared to himself, as he called a taxi to take him back to Sixty-ninth Street. He added, with that thumping of the heart which gave him again a feeling of inner faintness, "It's because she does."

CHAPTER VI

EARLY on an afternoon in the week before Christmas Bainbridge was returning from a business visit to Philadelphia. In the parlor-car he was almost alone, except for two or three people who sat with their backs to him at the distant end. Tired, idle, and happy in his dreams, he felt at liberty to be undignified. He lounged, therefore, in his arm-chair, and occasionally closed his eyes. To make himself more comfortable, he pulled round the revolving-chair in front of him, in order to rest a foot on it while he tried to doze. On the seat there lay a paper which a passenger had left behind him on getting out at Trenton.

It was a journal which Bainbridge recognized at once for the reason that it might almost be called a national institution. It could be purchased anywhere between Miami and Seattle or Bangor and Los Angeles. In all parts of Europe where Americans congregate it was also to be found, bringing the exile into intimate personal touch with his compatriots at home.

Once a week it appeared in Chicago, and was of a moral and elevating character sustained with a great big manly heartiness. Its aim was briefly indicated by the motto on its title-page, "*The whole truth, and nothing but the truth,*" to which it adhered as strictly as, in a world where truth is such an elusive quality, could have been

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expected. Its style was bluff and trenchant, and at the same time confidential. It could be as light as a feather in its persiflage, and as fierce as Jeremiah in its castigations. It had a way, too, of taking the reader to its heart and giving him that sense of self-importance which the fledgling gets when the man-about-town sits beside him in the smoking-room and tells him piquant anecdotes. By talking to you familiarly of other people's sins it brought your own virtues into prominence, while assuring you that within its columns you were—sin or no sin!—in very select company. No organ could have been more characteristic of a democratic country, since by its means the veriest outsider could feel, as the English like to put it, "in the know." Being in the know meant being in the secrets of wealthy or distinguished persons, whose hearts, for a multiplicity of reasons, might be otherwise shut against you. The same useful gift that enabled the prophet to tell the King of Israel what the King of Syria whispered in his bedchamber made it possible for this particular periodical to keep a passionately interested public informed of flirtations, escapades, and scandals quite as soon as the principals themselves knew they were involved in them. The interval between the crime and the chronicle was scarcely longer than that between the lightning and the thunder, if it was as long. Indeed, there had been instances when the chronicle had come before the crime, making the prophetic analogy even more exact.

It was not often that Bainbridge scanned these paragraphs, but he did it now, not from interest in their contents so much as from ennui and a vague amusement. He was still turning the pages listlessly, and with an inward smile, when his attention was attracted by a name. It

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was a name which at first merely danced before him, without context or coherence with the lines in which it occurred. He required a few seconds to get his eyes focused and his faculties into play, so as to read with comprehension.

I am sorry to hear that all is not well between the Leslie Pallisers, which is no more than those of us who have known Maggie for most of her five-and-thirty years have been expecting. That she shouldn't always be able to tie the decorative Leslie to her apron-strings any one with the social instinct might have been able to foretell. I saw them at the Cloudsleys', on the day when poor plain little Edith made her bow to the world, and a husband more bored or a wife more suspicious it has never been my lot to contemplate. It is a pity, I think, that married people should air their jealousies in public; but then Maggie always had a temper. Now, too, that a certain interesting, dark-eyed woman is again in New York we may look for dramatic surprises.

Bainbridge read this composition, first with amazement and then with incredulity. His chief misgiving was as to the amount of circulation such gossip would receive. That it would be wide he had no doubt. That among Leslie's and Maggie's extensive acquaintance there would be few who would not believe them to be at variance before the week was out was all too probable. That Maggie, were she to hear of it, would be bitterly angry with Leslie, whether he was to blame or not, was the result he held least in dread. What he feared was her own humiliation. Whether true or false, these statements would wound her to the quick. Proud and high-handed, but quiveringly sensitive where Leslie was concerned, she would not get over the effect for years. She might never get over it at all.

Before nightfall he had an opportunity to test his apprehensions. As it was his duty to report to Doctor

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Galloway what had happened in Philadelphia, he called at the rectory immediately on returning to New York. The rector was not at home; but Mrs. and Miss Galloway were in the drawing-room knitting for the Red Cross. Gifts of St. Mary Magdalen's being lavished on the church rather than on the rectory, the room was worn without being shabby, while there had been little or no attempt to harmonize colors and styles according to the modern taste in furnishing. It was cheerful, however, with a fire on the hearth, and a soft, bright spot thrown out by an electric lamp through a vellum shade painted in fruits and flowers.

It was not difficult for Bainbridge to introduce the subject on his mind, to which Mrs. Galloway responded in a deep contralto that was almost bass.

"I don't allow such stuff to lie about. My own copy never leaves my room, through fear of its falling into the hands of the servants."

A dimpling, dumpling, little bundle of a woman, her former prettiness was scarcely marred by an eyelid that drooped lower than its fellow and a mole with a tuft of hair at the corner of the upper lip.

"Oh, as to the servants," Miss Galloway replied, "they've generally a copy of their own. I often see it when I go to the kitchen."

Bainbridge felt his fears confirmed. "I was afraid it was rather widely read."

"It's a sin and a shame," came with mock severity from Mrs. Galloway. "People ought to boycott the thing. Then they'd stop printing it."

"Why don't you do that yourself, mother?"

"What would be the use of my doing it when other people wouldn't?"

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"You'd be one reader the less."

"I shouldn't care anything about that." She turned toward Bainbridge with a coquettish wayward toss of the head. She was accustomed to being the center of the room. "What are you going to do with a woman like me? I simply won't and can't and sha'n't reform. I'm a stone around my husband's neck, and a shocking example to my daughter. But what can any one do?"

Mary Galloway smiled gently and distantly, her eyes on her needles. "They can only allow you to be a privileged character, mother dear." She leaned forward to examine her parent's work. "Oh, what are you doing? You're not purling already?"

Mrs. Galloway laughed with an irresponsibility that seemed to come from tipsiness because of the droop of her eyelid. "I got tired of that everlasting knitting stitch. I thought I'd do something different."

The daughter took the work into her own hands. "It will all have to come out, right down to there."

During the task of readjustment to which Mrs. Galloway submitted her work without protest, chuckling like a naughty child, Bainbridge had time to notice the change that had come over the girl during the past month or two. She had grown thin; she looked tired. Some of her pretty color had wasted away, and her eyes, in which there had always been a sparkle of fun, seemed to have grown larger and softer and vaguer. The dash of disdain had gone from her manner, its place being taken by a listlessness against which she strove by spurts and sallies that subsided suddenly, as if she forgot to keep them up. Since she was unaware of the thoughts he had entertained toward her for a day or two and of the way in which Clorinda Gildersleeve had dispelled them, it comforted

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him to think that the change could have nothing to do with him.

As she unraveled her mother's work he reverted to the topic of the Pallisers. "Of course no one who knows Leslie and Maggie will take such rubbish seriously—"

"I shall," Mrs. Galloway interrupted, gaily. "I believe it. I'm prepared to accept the worst."

"It's no more than has been said about a good many other people," Miss Galloway observed.

"And who can possibly be the contributors? They must be people with some means of knowing what goes on."

As he spoke his glance encountered Miss Galloway's; and it was perhaps because each read the mind of the other that they looked hastily away. Mrs. Galloway laughed with chuckling gaiety.

"How do you know I'm not one? I'd write for them if they'd pay me well enough—and give them their money's worth."

"If Maggie stays at home," Mary Galloway remarked, her eyes on her knitting, "she's sure to hear of it. She mayn't read the thing herself—every one isn't so keen on the higher literature as mother—but some kind friend will let it out. If Leshe could only be persuaded to take her away over Christmas! I know she's out of sorts, and rather dreading the big family party they'll have to go to at somebody's house. Leslie could be tired, too, and make it an excuse for spending the holiday at Aiken or White Sulphur Springs. I'd drop him the hint if I knew him well enough."

On reflection it seemed a wise step to take. Returning to his house, therefore, he telephoned to Palliser, asking him to look in on him during the evening, should he find

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himself without an engagement. Summoning Wedlock, he commissioned him to go out and buy the current issue of the journal which had caused so much friendly perturbation.

Wedlock shuffled, proceeding to hem and haw. The typical decent English valet, getting on toward middle life, he hesitated at spanning the gulf that parted master from man. "If I might make so bold, sir," he began at last, "not meaning any offense, or to take a liberty that you might be against my taking, in a manner of speaking, sir, but if I don't offend you, go out of my place—"

"You won't go out of your place or offend me, either, Wedlock. What is it?"

"Well, sir, me and Mrs. Wedlock, not wishing to be more intimate with our betters than we've a right to be—but seeing we're in service, in a manner of speaking, and liking to know what's what, and how our betters carries on—"

"Do you mean that you've got a copy in the house?"

"Well, sir, in a manner of speaking, yes—that is, if it wouldn't be a liberty or take me out of my place—"

"Even Wedlock reads it," Bainbridge thought. Aloud he said: "Then lend it to me. It will save your going out."

"Have you seen this?"

Palliser answered, scornfully: "Why, no. Never read the rag. But it's queer; you're the second man who has asked me that to-day."

They were sitting in Bainbridge's study, in the same relative positions and chairs which he and Malcolm Grant had occupied nearly two years before.

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"Then you'd better look at it."

Palliser, who had lighted a cigarette, paused, with the match still burning between his fingers. "There's nothing in it about me, is there?"

Bainbridge passed the journal to his friend, the paragraph marked in pencil. "You can see for yourself."

Putting his cigarette to his lips at intervals, while he blew out light puffs of smoke, Palliser scanned the lines rapidly. Bainbridge watched the cloud descend on the romantic face, though the sudden exclamation at the end took him by surprise.

"My God! Who could have got hold of that?" Dashing the paper to his knee, he crumpled it in his hand. But the expression changed instantly, becoming guarded and alert. "I mean," he began to stammer, "what are they—what are they trying to put over on us?"

The revelation Bainbridge had received was so much more than he was expecting that for a minute or two he was at a loss as to what to say. "You don't mean to tell me," he asked, finding it difficult to put the question into words, "that there's—there's truth in it?"

Palliser answered, absently: "No, no; that is— Well, perhaps if I said—" He broke off impatiently. "Oh, hang it all, Arthur! This is New York. What do you suppose?"

Bainbridge took his time. "Well, I hadn't supposed *that*," he said, simply, when he could articulate the words.

Palliser's thoughts again went wandering. "No, no; you wouldn't." He burst out eagerly: "If I can only keep Maggie from hearing about it! I don't mind for myself—the gossip and that kind of rot—but Maggie's another matter."

"Quite so; it's why I asked you to come round this

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evening. Maggie's the type of woman not to distinguish clearly between the true and the false, the minute the thing has been said." He added, softly, "I took it for granted that it *was* false."

Palliser seized the opportunity to deny what he could. "Some of it is false—see? There's nothing wrong between Maggie and me. I've taken care of that. Maggie's not jealous—at least, not more than any other married woman—just by fits and starts—but nothing serious or permanent. That's pure invention."

From sheer eagerness Bainbridge leaned forward, an arm resting across his knee. "I suppose we may as well talk frankly, Leslie, now that we're on the subject. Whatever has happened, or is still to happen, I can't be anything but your friend."

"I know that; but"—he rose and began to pace restlessly about the room—"but how *can* I be frank? I'm not—not the only one involved."

Bainbridge's eyes followed him. "You mean that there *is* this—this other woman?"

Palliser came to a standstill in the shadow of the bookcases on the other side of the room. He answered with deliberation and unusual distinctness. "There was; there isn't now." He continued, in a more broken tone: "She's an—an—an actress. You wouldn't know her name, so it's no use to tell you anything about her."

"I'm not asking you anything about her. I don't want to know. For the minute Maggie is our only consideration. Everything else can wait till you want to take it up—if you ever do."

"I never shall," Palliser declared, huskily, "because it's all over. Been over and done with for three years and more. Thought it was not only dead and buried, but

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that nobody knew it had ever been alive. How the devil this confounded rag can have got hold of it—"

"When once you choose to do that sort of thing, Leslie, you never know who—"

Palliser stepped forward from the obscurity in which he had taken refuge. "I didn't choose to do that sort of thing," he interrupted, fiercely. "I never thought of it. Neither did she. It—it flared up."

"Does anything ever flare up unless there's something out of which to make a fire?"

The words were scarcely out of Bainbridge's mouth before it came to him that he had used them on some similar occasion. He had used them, too, in response to some such remark as this. When? Where? The recollection eluded him. It was like a memory that is not a memory—that may be a hint of a previous existence or no more than something imagined or dreamed. For the instant he had no time to give to it, since Palliser went on:

"No, I dare say nothing does flare up unless there's something out of which to make a fire, but at present that's not the point. The fire is out—to all intents and purposes. What I've got to provide against is Maggie's seeing there are ashes."

Bainbridge perceived his opportunity. "Why shouldn't you take her away—over Christmas?"

"What good would that do? Wherever she went she'd see this cursed thing in the bookstalls for another week."

"You could keep her from that, and by the time you came back you'd find that no one had paid it any attention unless they keep at you. If they do, and Maggie discovers there has been an actress in your life—"

Palliser came forward, resolutely, throwing his half-smoked cigarette into the fire. "I think I'll be off. But

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before I go, Arthur, I've a favor to ask you. Don't—" He seemed hung up for words, or for the exact thought he was trying to express. "Don't," he began again, "don't say anything to me about—about the—the actress—till I give you the tip. See? It's all over, you understand—but I can't talk of it—not even with you—not yet awhile, at any rate."

Bainbridge rose, laying a hand on his friend's shoulder. "All right, Leslie. I shall never speak of it unless you do; but I sha'n't keep it a secret from you that I'm thinking a lot."

They were in the hall, where Palliser, who had thrown a handsome fur coat over his dinner-jacket, stood thoughtful and somber and more than ever ornamental. Suddenly he looked up. "Arthur," he exclaimed, sharply, "don't get married!"

Bainbridge was taken by surprise. "What makes you think I've any idea of doing it?"

Palliser moved toward the door. "Never mind that; but—but *don't*. You're well enough off as you are." He had turned the knob and was passing out when he added: "Or if you do—marry Mary Galloway. She was cut out for you."

Before he could make any retort to this Bainbridge found himself alone. Going back to his study, he fell to meditating. He did so, leaning against the mantel-piece, with his back to the dying fire. He was reckoning up the time. It was all over, Leslie had said, three years before. That meant it had been going on during the first few months in which he himself had been at St. Mary Magdalen's, at the very time when Leslie had been showing so much interest in all that affected the parish life. He could do that—he could seem to live happily

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with Maggie—he could seem to be at peace with his conscience—and still be keeping up an affair that had plainly cut deeply into his heart, with some one on the stage. Bainbridge wondered how men who were not depraved—as Leslie certainly was not—could combine blends of conduct so incongruous. If there was any palliation of the guilt it lay in the fact that it had not been a matter of premeditation. It had flared up.

He was thrown back on that elusive, tantalizing memory. These words had certainly been spoken to him once before, and in circumstances that bore a resemblance to those of this evening. But when—and where—and by whom?

And yet as he searched his recollections of the past four years his mind revolted against the task. It was like going back into a jungle, stifling, smothering, miasmatic. So much had been told him! So many hearts had been poured into his! Had he not had wholesome counter-agents within himself—had he not been able to dismiss and forget—he must have been sickened, poisoned, by the inflow of nauseating confidence.

In the end he gave the effort up. He did so not from lack of interest in the matter, but because he dropped again into his arm-chair to indulge in happy dreams. They were dreams of Clorinda Gildersleeve, whom on the next day, at her own invitation, he was to see for the first time at home.

CHAPTER VII

TO pass the white vestibule, with its strip of red carpet and its two pointed box-trees, was to Bainbridge as the fulfilment of a ceremonial rite. The man who admitted him was in keeping with the admirable neatness of the entry, correct, cadaverous, lantern-jawed, needing only the touch of powder in the hair to make the visitor feel he was in London. Within, all was fresh, immaculate, and spacious, while the footfall was soundless on soft red carpet like the strip outside, adding warmth to what was already restful. One blue-green bit of Flemish tapestry and one full-length portrait that might have been a Gainsborough relieved the white paneling of a hall from which a library at the front of the house and a dining-room at the back were dimly revealed. On the first low landing of the stairs was an ebony Chinese pedestal on which stood a celadon Chinese jar.

Bainbridge knew finer houses in New York, but none that gave this impression of spotlessness and simplicity. He was not in the habit of observing such details, and did it now mainly because the setting so beautifully suited the exquisite soul who dwelt within it. It was with a palpitating sense of reverence that he followed the footman to the drawing-room up-stairs.

As he had looked forward to seeing Clorinda alone, he was disappointed, on reaching the upper floor, to hear

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voices. Part of the white-and-gold expanse of the drawing-room being visible from the stairway itself, he could see Mary Galloway moving about, inspecting objects that lay on tables and hung over the backs of chairs. He could hear her say, in her silvery staccato: "Oh, but they're much too good. I don't believe they'll let them accept them."

Clorinda replied, tenderly: "The poor things! It's Christmas. I want them to have something nice. They're girls, after all."

With the words she moved into view, wearing a poetic, trailing, filmy thing of the black-blue of sapphires under artificial light. A gold thread running through it here and there gleamed in the softened electricity. One bright bar of orange—or was it fire?—struck across the dusky pallor of the skin, below the opening at the throat. Her greeting was simple and unforced, and, for the first time, lacked the preliminary look of fear.

"How do you do? I hoped you'd come. Mary is here. We're looking at the presents I've got for the poor girls at that home of which you were telling me. I hope you won't say they're too good for them—like Mary."

With such grace as he could summon up Bainbridge was obliged to accommodate himself to conditions lamentably different from those to which he had been looking forward. He, too, inspected blouses, sweaters, handkerchiefs, gloves, doing his best to seem enthusiastic, but secretly dissatisfied. Obscurely he felt as if a trick had been played upon him—had he been able to attribute any such act to the woman he loved—and he was not free from the impression that Mary Galloway's discomfort was similar to his own. She was undoubtedly disturbed by his coming, and perhaps displeased. Before they had made

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the round of the presents she began adjusting her veil and putting on her gloves.

"Oh, but you're not going," Clorinda protested. "You said you'd have tea."

Miss Galloway consulted the watch on her wrist. "I'm—I'm afraid I sha'n't have time, after all. Mother will be expecting me home, and—"

Moving in her gentle, stately way to the bell, Clorinda put her finger on the button. "Then we'll have it at once. I shall certainly not let you go on this cold day without it."

So the minutes to which Bainbridge had been looking forward as the beginning of a new epoch in his life threatened to become like other minutes. They were, in fact, a little below the level of other minutes, since, in the polite conversation that ensued, he was reduced to the proportions of the tea-drinking curate of the stage. He foresaw, too, that when Mary Galloway rose courtesy would compel him to do the same, and that, as their ways lay together, he should walk up Fifth Avenue in her company. He would have had no objection to her company had it not been for the odd feeling of embarrassment which had crept unexplainably between them. Though for this he couldn't blame himself, he was not free from that unreasonable sense of guilt which a woman's silent bearing can impose upon a man who has nothing whatever on his conscience. It was almost as if she knew, what she could not possibly have known, that he might have been in love with her by now, if Clorinda hadn't intervened.

What Clorinda felt he had no means of guessing, beyond the fact that she seemed resolved to keep to friendly superficialities. He wondered if she was beginning to

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divine what was in his heart and was growing afraid of it. Was she backing out? Was she running away? Was she hiding behind Mary Galloway? Was she saying to him tacitly, as Leslie had said on the previous night: "*Marry Mary Galloway. She was cut out for you. I was not.*" Of course she was not! As to that he had never been under an illusion. That she should stoop to a humdrum parson like himself was scarcely among possibilities. If he cherished a hope for it—a hope that was scarcely a hope—it was only because of that agitation on her part, whenever he was near, which a woman betrays only when a man speaks to the emotional within her. Had he not at one minute caught her eyes in what became on his side a long, demanding, imperious look to which she returned some cryptic, untranslatable response, he would have made up his mind that she wanted to get rid of him.

With the vital thoughts elsewhere they were talking of books and plays and a recent engagement when a peal at the door-bell rang startlingly through the house. Before the door could be opened the peal was followed by another, more violent and prolonged. Mary Galloway broke off in the middle of a sentence to look at Clorinda. Clorinda looked at Bainbridge and grew pale. It was as if she had been expecting something which might now have come to pass. "What can that be?" she murmured; but the question was so faint as to do no more than pass her lips.

They listened while a woman's voice exchanged a few words with the footman, after which came a rushing swish of skirts on the stairway. "It's Maggie," Mary Galloway said, under her breath. "No one else would come in like that."

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"Then something must be the matter," Bainbridge added, rising to go into the hall.

Clorinda also rose, standing pale, calm, spirit-like, behind the tea-table with its masses of silver.

Before Bainbridge could reach the hall Maggie burst upon the threshold, coming abruptly to a halt. "You've been talking about me," she declared, in a voice loud with accusation.

Behind her veil her face was red, while her hat had been knocked awry, probably on too hastily getting into her motor or out of it. Her eyes were brilliant and wild, like those of a woman under the influence of stimulants or drugs. Mary Galloway, who alone remained seated, answered her.

"No, we haven't been, Maggie dear. We've been talking of the new play at the Gramercy. Do come and sit down and let Clorinda give you a cup of tea."

As Bainbridge drew up a chair for her, Maggie advanced a step or two into the room, but again came to a standstill. "What is it you all know," she demanded, "that I don't? What is every one talking about that I haven't heard of?"

"What *have* you heard, Maggie?" Bainbridge inquired, still holding the chair for her.

"I haven't heard anything," Maggie cried, angrily—"not really. I've been to see Claribel Jarrott—"

"If I were you," Bainbridge broke in, "I shouldn't be distressed by anything Mrs. Endsleigh Jarrott says about any one. She's the type of woman who is never happy unless she's making mischief."

"But she knows something," Mrs. Palliser insisted. "She spoke as if you all knew it—as if it was the talk of the town."

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"If Mrs. Jarrott knows anything she should tell you plainly," Bainbridge said, soothingly, "or leave the subject alone."

Maggie turned round to him fiercely. "I know what Claribel Jarrott is. You don't have to tell me. But that doesn't affect the point, if anything's being kept from me about Leslie that I ought to know—"

"Nothing is being kept from you that you ought to know—" Bainbridge began again.

"Well, then, that I *might* know—that *you* know—that everybody knows."

"Maggie dear," Mary Galloway said, gently, "no one knows anything, so far as I am aware, that you don't know yourself. If you're going to work yourself up over every idle tale—"

"Leslie has no business to have idle tales told about him. No, I can't sit down," she cried, impatiently, as Bainbridge pushed the chair forward. "I don't want to. You're all against me. You know things you won't tell me—"

"But we don't, Maggie darling."

"Then why should Claribel take me by the hand—and cry over me—and say that if I had to leave Leslie her house would be open to me—?"

"Partly because she's a foolish and dangerous woman," Bainbridge explained, "and partly because of something else which I'm going to tell you in the hope that you'll take it with the wholesome common sense which is one of your characteristics."

She surveyed him haughtily. "I'll take it as I have to take it, Arthur. All I ask is to know."

He stepped forward so as to be nearer her. Clorinda moved away from the tea-table toward the chimney-

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piece, where she stood with face partially averted from the group as she gazed into the fire. She had said nothing since Maggie had entered the room.

"What Mrs. Jarrott was referring to was a very silly paragraph in a paper you'd only smile over. I saw it myself—two days ago—by accident—on the train coming from Philadelphia. It isn't worth your paying a minute's attention to—"

"I'll judge of that."

"Couldn't you let me judge of it? You know me well, and Leslie knows me—"

"Coming from Philadelphia," she reflected. "Two days ago. That was the evening you rang up Leslie and asked him to come down and see you. Was it about this?"

"Yes, it was about this. I wanted Leslie to know that the thing was in print, so that you might be protected from seeing it."

Her face and voice grew stormier. "And you suggested to him that he should take me away."

"I did. I was afraid that if you stayed in New York during the next few days the thing that has happened *would* happen."

"And it would be better to keep me in the dark."

"It would be better not to wound you when the wounding wouldn't do any good."

"Or come between Leslie and his mistresses. That was your idea, too, wasn't it?"

"Maggie!"

It was Mary Galloway who uttered the exclamation. Clorinda only turned round and looked at the passionate woman silently.

"No, Maggie," Bainbridge said, quietly. "It wasn't

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my idea. I think I know what I'm talking of when I say that Leslie has no mistresses."

She laughed excitedly. "Then it must be an entr'acte."

"Maggie, I'm surprised at you," he said, sternly. "You make me feel that, after all, that idiotic paragraph may be justified."

"Oh, very likely. Tell me what it said, and I'll answer you."

"Then I shall. It said you were—jealous of your husband."

"Oh, that's nothing. I am. I make no secret of it. I *am*—and with reason. Did it say any more?"

"Yes; I shall tell you that, too. It will show you how you impress other people. It said, in effect, that you had an uncontrollable temper."

"Well, I have. Leslie knew that when he married me. I've paid him to put up with it, and I've paid him well."

"Oh, Maggie," Mary Galloway cried, "don't say such things; or at least don't say them before us!"

Maggie glared at them all madly. "Why shouldn't I say it? Don't you know it? Doesn't all New York know it? Haven't I bought him? Did he have a penny of his own in the world? Was he anybody? Didn't I make him? Haven't I given him all the position he's got? He's mine; I own him; he's my creation. He hasn't a coat to his back but what I've given him; he doesn't draw a breath but I furnish him with the air. Why shouldn't I have a temper? Why shouldn't I be jealous? Wouldn't you be jealous if the thing you had formed—?"

"Be quiet, Maggie," Bainbridge commanded. "You'll be sorry for these things when you've thought them over; and then—"

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She uttered her wild laugh. "I can't be sornier for them than I am now; and now my heart is breaking."

"If your heart is breaking you're breaking it yourself. Don't put the blame on Leslie, when all he lives for is your happiness."

She cried out, derisively: "Lives for my happiness! My God! When he's deceived me with half the women in New York!"

"But he hasn't," Bainbridge insisted. "If he had I should know."

"Vell, if it was only with one, the consequence would be the same. He would have deceived me."

Clorinda came slowly forward as if about to speak, but as Bainbridge continued she again stood still, at a distance. "Do you know for a fact that there has been any other woman—even one—in his life, besides yourself?"

The great voice came out with the effect of a tumultuous sob. "I don't know *anything* for a fact. I only know that for the past three or four years I've been living in a kind of nightmare. I've felt that something was wrong between Leslie and me without being able to tell what it was. He's been miles away from me; we've been worlds apart; and yet I haven't been able to put my finger on a single incident, or catch him up in a single word, that would bear me out. It's been smothering me; it's been killing me; but I haven't dared so much as to utter a cry. I've felt at times that you all must see it—that you at least must see it, Clorinda, when you've been in this country—but you all seem to be on Leslie's side and think he has a right to r make me suffer."

"I didn't know he was making you suffer—" Bainbridge began, gently.

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"Because I've laughed and scolded and put up my big bluff, and tried to persuade myself that what I couldn't see I mustn't believe; but now when Claribel Jarrott comes to me with her whining sympathy I—I can't—I can't—I can't do it any longer."

She dropped into the chair which Bainbridge was still holding by the back, burying her face in the muff she threw on the table beside her. Sobs racked her as if she was a child; as if she was a child she wept aloud with a naïve shamelessness.

Clorinda advanced again, the light striking from the gold threads in her dress. "Maggie," she began, hoarsely, "Maggie—"

But Bainbridge put up a warning hand as an indication that Maggie was to be allowed to weep. It was Mary Galloway who sprang forward, kneeling on the floor beside her friend and throwing an arm across the broad, heaving shoulder.

Slowly Clorinda withdrew toward the fire, where she sat down, with a sort of shivering, in its glow. She remained there, a mute, bowed figure, curiously weary, while the others did their best in the task of giving consolation.

When Maggie raised her head and began to dry her eyes by thrusting her handkerchief beneath her veil, Bainbridge was sitting near her, where his eyes could look into hers. Mary continued to kneel on the floor, though her arm had slipped down to the older woman's waist.

"I'm a big baby," Maggie sobbed, convulsively, "but it's been so awfully hard."

"I can see that," Bainbridge agreed, softly, "but I had no idea of it till this afternoon."

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"I've suffered so," Maggie continued, as she blew her nose, "and now I shall make him feel what it is."

"I would, if it will give you any comfort."

With her handkerchief raised half-way to her face she stared at him. "It won't give me any comfort, but—" The sobs still shook her, as she said: "It's so terrible to be fighting something and not know what it is."

Clorinda looked up again, but both Bainbridge and Mary were too intensely occupied with Maggie to notice the act.

"And you want him to tell you. Is that it?" Bainbridge inquired.

"I want to make him suffer in the way he's made me."

"You could hardly make him suffer in that way. He might suffer in some other way—"

"In any way, then! It 'll be all the same to me so long as he feels it."

"And if he does you'll be happy."

"Oh, happy! It's no use to talk about that."

"I think it is. You've a right to be happy—as happy as you can make yourself. You must make the children happy, too. You've got to think of them. As a matter of fact, you've got to think of them before you think of anything or anybody else. And if seeing Leslie smart is going to accomplish that—"

She blew her nose again. "I can look after the children," she said, roughly. "You leave them to me."

"Quite so. But what do you propose doing? Don't you think you'd better have some form of program in mind? You wouldn't want to strike wildly, and be sorry for it afterward."

"I shall strike as I can."

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"Then you'll do it wildly, and the blow will probably recoil upon yourself. Unless you know what you're doing it seems to me better to wait."

"No, I sha'n't wait. If I do—he'll—he'll get round me."

"But why should he? If you don't care anything about him—?"

She hid her face in her hands and sobbed again. "But I do—I do—I do. That's the worst of it."

"And may be the best of it."

"Maggie darling," Mary Galloway whispered, "you love him—of course." We all know that. And since you do—since there's no question about that in your mind, or his, or ours—isn't it better to act in love rather than in anger? Anger passes, but love remains. Don't—*don't* sacrifice the thing that makes your life to what may not be the feeling of an hour."

"Oh, you don't know anything about it. You've never had a husband. If you had had, you'd be just as crazy as I am." She staggered heavily to her feet. "It's no use talking. You're all on Leslie's side."

"No, Maggie darling," Mary protested. "We're not on Leslie's side. We're only on the side of love. Aren't we, Mr. Bainbridge? Aren't we, Clorinda? One doesn't need to have been married to know that to wound your own love is to wound the most sacred thing about you. That's all we want to keep you from. We love you; no one could help loving you who knows you as you really are; and we want to save you from what you may bitterly regret."

Maggie continued to blow her nose, while Mary straightened the crooked hat. "I'm going home. You must all excuse me. I'm a great big baby; but, oh, it's been so

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hard. I didn't expect to find any one here but Clorinda. I knew she'd be sorry for me—"

Clorinda spoke from the fireside, without rising or turning round, "I am, Maggie; more than I can say."

"You needn't try to tell me. I know how you feel."

The response was in a tone at once ringing and dead: "Oh no, you don't. It's far beyond anything you can have any idea of."

Maggie moved toward the door. Her commonplace manner of speaking had in some degree come back to her. "Well, I'm going, anyhow. Good-by, all of you. I'm—I'm sorry to have made such a fuss—but you know what I am."

Mary Galloway picked up her muff and prepared to depart. She, too, endeavored to take a colloquial tone. "I'm going with you, Maggie dear. Good-by, Clorinda. Thank you for showing me the things."

Feeling it his duty to accompany the women and, if possible, extract from Maggie a promise to say nothing to her husband that might make matters worse, Bainbridge advanced toward Clorinda to take his leave. As she neither moved nor looked up at him on his approach, he was obliged—privileged, he thought—to lean over her.

"I'm sorry this had to happen here," he said; "and yet if Maggie had to pour out her soul anywhere it was better that it should be to us rather than to strangers."

"It would have been still better if there had been nothing to make her do it."

"I dare say it isn't as bad as she thinks."

"And yet it may be worse."

He was afraid to discuss that point lest he should betray his knowledge of the actress. "I must run away now, as I've more to say to Maggie; but I haven't seen

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you in the way I expected. Mayn't I come back again some other time?"

Her face was still averted as she answered him. "If I said No to that you'd be hurt, wouldn't you?—and I don't want to hurt you."

"Then I'll take that as your answer—and come."

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If I
on't

CHAPTER VIII

THERE it is now. I see it. I'm going to get one."
"No, Maggie, no," Mary Galloway pleaded.

"Yes, let her," Bainbridge said, in a tone of authority.
"Let her read all there is."

He himself stopped the motor as they passed a lighted newspaper-stand, and got out. When he came back with the weekly in his hand he had already opened it to the offending paragraph. Maggie tried to read it by the light of the limousine electric, but her eyes were too blurred with tears.

"I can't," she moaned. "Tell him to drive on."

Up through Fifth Avenue she lay back in her corner of the motor, silent, suffering, with eyes closed, grasping the paper like a treasure to her breast.

"I sha'n't go in, Maggie," Miss Galloway whispered when they reached the house in Sixty-ninth Street.

"Then Tufts will take you home."

Bainbridge said nothing, accompanying Mrs. Palliser into the house as a matter of course.

On the ground floor, near the front door, was a small room used chiefly by Leslie or his stenographer as a kind of office. It was also a housing-place for his collection of eighteenth-century mezzo-tint portraits of judges, statesmen, and economists, with which the walls were hung. Followed by Bainbridge, Maggie bustled in here, switch-

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ing on the electric light and saying over her shoulder, "Please shut the door." Dropping into a chair beside a table on which stood a typewriter covered up from the dust by a black oilcloth cap, she put up her veil and read. Beyond the fact that the high color surged into her face, making it almost purple, she gave no sign till she had finished the paragraph.

"What's this?" she asked, then, not angrily, but in a meek, tearful, puzzled voice. "What's this about a certain interesting, dark-eyed woman? Who is she?"

Bainbridge felt himself within the limits of truth in saying: "I don't know. But what I do know is this, that you're now up against the critical moment of your life, and it's for you to show what the principles you've been professing all these years amount to."

She looked round to where he stood, still wearing his overcoat and holding his hat in his hand, with his back against the door. "What do you mean?—the principles I've been professing all these years?"

"As an active member of St. Mary Magdalen's you've been an active member of the church at large. As a member of the church at large you've subscribed to certain laws of conduct. Now then, the time has come to show whether you mean to live by those laws or not."

She shook her head. "I don't understand a bit."

"Why did you get married?"

The blankness of her expression betrayed her surprise at so futile a question. "Because I was in love with Leslie, of course."

"And you've learned that being in love with Leslie has involved some amount of give and take, haven't you?"

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She uttered her sob-like gasp. "Oh, there's been plenty of take."

"But you took it."

"Took it! I've swallowed it by tons."

"But having swallowed it—by tons—did you think of yourself as a bigger or a smaller woman for doing it?"

"He shouldn't have called on me to do it. He shouldn't—"

"No, of course he shouldn't; but that is not our present point. I'm asking you if, when you'd taken the dose, you thought of yourself as a better wife to Leslie, or a worse one?"

"If Leslie could have had a better wife than I've been—"

"Yes, exactly; but that's still not the question before us. I want to know if you think you would have been a better wife to him by not taking what there was to take—"

"I never took more than I was obliged to, and I wouldn't have taken that if—"

"If there had been a way of not doing it. Quite so. But let me put the question in this way. When you married Leslie was it primarily to be a good wife to him, or to get a good husband for yourself?"

"It was both."

"It was both, of course; but I'm asking which it was in the first place."

"It wasn't either in the first place. After what I was willing to do for Leslie—and *have* done—it was the least I could expect that—"

"But suppose you'd been obliged to put the one before the other, and to choose between being a good wife to Leslie and having a good husband for yourself, on which would you have decided?"

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"I'd have been a good wife to Leslie, just as I've always been; and if Leslie thinks I haven't—"

"I know he doesn't think so, not for a minute. But in declaring that you would prefer to be a good wife to Leslie, even at the sacrifice of having him as a good husband to you, are you speaking sincerely or only because you think it's the right thing to say?"

"I'm speaking sin—"

"Think, now, Maggie. Take your time. It's a question all married people, and all people who think of being married, should know how to answer. What were you primarily thinking of?"

The poor red face, furrowed with trouble and stained with tears, was turned toward his piteously. She looked away from him, then back to him again, then down at her hands, then up at the ceiling. The process of concentrated thinking did not come to her easily, and she took it somewhat as a child. "I said it," she gasped at last, "because—because it's the right thing to say."

"That is, when you married you were looking first of all for a good husband for yourself?"

"Yes," she asserted, with the firmness of one who means not to be ashamed of the position.

"And what do you think of your success?"

"If Leslie had only been the husband to me that I've been wife to him—"

"That's just the point. What Leslie has been to you is his own affair—"

Having been sitting in profile toward him, and speaking over her shoulder, she wheeled round so as to face him directly. "What Leslie has been to me is his own affair? Do you mean to say it isn't *mine*?"

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"Not in the first place. What's your affair in the first place is what you have been to him."

"I know what I've been to him," she declared, in her mannish way. "But to say that it's not my affair what he's been to me is equal to saying that it's not my affair if a man doesn't pay me money when he owes it."

"Not quite—for the reason that money is a material thing that you can reckon and exact. You can't reckon and exact—love. Love—I mean the love others feel for us—has to be left free. You can neither constrain it nor restrain it, nor can you make a bargain by which so much love must be paid back to us for so much that we give."

"I've given Leslie more than love—"

"You've given him money. Yes, so you told us just now."

She hung her head. "I wasn't telling you anything you didn't know," she began, apologetically.

"Oh yes, you were, Maggie. You told us that you were *aware* of giving it. I don't think any of us had any idea of that—till then."

She continued, with some shame, in her own defense, "I shouldn't have been aware of it if he hadn't gone spending my money on other women."

He stepped toward the table, coming into the glow of the light. "Even if you knew that for a fact, which you don't—"

"No, but I'm very nearly sure of it. I've felt it for years; and now," she continued, with her hand on the paper, "there's this."

"Being very nearly sure means not knowing anything about it. But we'll let that pass. Assuming that what you say is true, then it's still Leslie's affair, unless—"

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She broke in wrathfully: "My God! Arthur, for a sane man you *are* the biggest fool—"

"Wait; you haven't let me finish; I'm going to say it's still Leslie's affair—unless you mean to break with him."

"Break with him? Break with him, how?"

"Separate from him; send him about his business; divorce him."

She stared up at him. "Do *you* advise me to do that?"

"No, I don't; but unless you make up your mind to it—"

"Well, what?"

"You must make up your mind to the other thing."

"What other thing?"

"To living with him, to going on as in the past."

"Well, I have made up my mind to it. What else did you think?"

"I thought you were trying to find something between the two—to living with him, and making him unhappy."

"Don't you think he deserves it?"

"Not on any such grounds as you know anything about. If you're going by that thing—" He pointed to the paper lying on the table.

"Oh, but I'm not. That only corroborates what I've felt for the last three or four years."

"All the same you don't *know*. And even if you did, so long as you mean to live with Leslie you must live with him on a high plane and not on a low one. That's what I meant just now when I spoke of being true to your principles. If principles stand for anything in your life, you've got a chance to prove it."

"Prove it how?"

"By changing your mental basis; by thinking less of

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what sort of a husband Leslie is to you, and more of what sort of a wife you are to him."

She slapped her hand sharply on the table. "I've been a *good* wife to him. No one could have been better."

"Really? Then in that case there's no more to be said."

"What do you think yourself, man? You've been in and out for the past four years. You've seen with your own eyes—"

"What I see with my own eyes, Maggie, is that you've been nourishing suspicions in your heart, and turning into realities things you don't know anything about; and now when the minute comes you let them all rush out like a freshet in the spring, with a force that will carry you both away with it. Remember that you can't punish Leslie without punishing yourself; and of the two it's probably you who'll suffer most."

She sat for a few minutes, with her elbow resting on the table and her hand shading her eyes. When she looked up it was to say:

"Then what would you have me do?"

"I'd have you not attempt, or think you can attempt, the impossible."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that you can't live Leslie's life, or shoulder his duties, or make up for his shortcomings, or be responsible for his sins. You've got enough to do with your own. If you wanted to be rid of him—to divorce him, as you might possibly find you could do—I don't say it, mind you! but it's what you've been hinting at yourself—but if you wanted to be free—well, that would be another thing."

Bringing both her fists down on the table with a thump,

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she cried out: "But, good Lord, man, I love him more than I ever did!"

"Quite so; but instead of showing love, you now propose to show hatred. Can love possibly act in that way?"

"But what else can I do when he—?"

"You can go on loving him; you can show him more love and more love; you can love him for *himself* and not for *yourself*."

"Haven't I been doing that?"

"No, Maggie, no. It's time you understood it—time you opened your eyes to the fact that your love has been selfish, egotistic. You've loved Leslie—you told us so just now, didn't you?—as something you owned, something you'd bought, something you'd created."

"But how can I help it, when before he married me he was only a wee little instructor in political economy at Columbia"—she snapped her fingers—"and didn't have a cent to his name?"

He looked at her with a pitying smile. "Poor Maggie! That's just it. You don't see—you must forgive me for saying it!—or, rather, you can forgive me or not, as you like!—you'll be the happier for knowing it, and you'll never be happy till you do know it! You don't see that in many ways Leslie is superior to you—and that your work is to try to come up to him." As he could see that resentment struggled in her mind with approval of his words, he went on: "Leslie is really a distinguished man, in his own line. He's the friend of distinguished men, and he brings them to your house. He's more than that. There's something rather exquisite in his nature, something ultra-refined—"

"Oh, we're all ultra-refined nowadays," she declared, scornfully.

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"Pardon me, we're not. Some of us have a great deal to learn in that direction. I'd think of that, Maggie, if I were you."

"Are you hinting that—that I'm—I'm"—she could hardly pronounce the words—"that I'm—I'm *not* refined?"

"You're splendid, Maggie. You're good and honest and true and sincere; but there's something about Leslie—"

"Which isn't about me? Is that it?"

"Nor about me; nor about most of us." She drew a long, hard breath as he continued: "You speak of what I've seen with my own eyes, Maggie. Well, among other things, I've seen that, much as you love Leslie, you've never treated him otherwise than as a regnant queen might treat a prince consort. You've *given* to him; you've not been willing to share a common life with him. In this very house you've always been the head, while he's been a few removes higher than the butler."

"Arthur, what nonsense!"

"It's true, Maggie. You've spoken of my house and my motor and my guests at times when most people would say *our*."

"But Leslie's always known that he was free to consider everything—"

"As his own. Yes, while you considered that it was not his own—not quite his own—and Leslie is as sensitive to that sort of slight as mercury to cold. You've ruled him, Maggie—"

A sound at the outside door impelled her to whisper: "Hush! He's coming in."

"Then I shall leave you together. Remember, Maggie, that you're now at a turning-point in your life. It may

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depend on what you say within the next few minutes whether you win Leslie back—”

“If I have to win him *back* I don't know that I want him.”

“Then it's something you ought to know—to know in such a way that you'll be sure of what you're about. Remember, too, that nothing is so patient as the right kind of love; and that if your love isn't patient it's not of the right kind. There's something lacking to it—something you must supply before you've a right to take any one to task. Why not wait till you can see exactly where you're tending? What good will it do you or your children to humiliate their father when you've no end in view beyond his humiliation?”

Snatching up the paper and slipping it under her coat, she muttered words to the effect that it was easy for people to talk when they hadn't known the suffering, while Bainbridge threw open the door. Palliser was in the hall, where the footman was helping him out of his fur coat.

“Hello, Arthur!”

“Hello, Leslie!”

“Stay to dinner, won't you?”

“Thanks, no. Have a meeting this evening. .Came home with Maggie, to—to talk over something.” He nodded toward the reception-room. “She's in there.”

To Bainbridge, Palliser's expression was not the less pitiable for being ridiculous. The guilty man coming face to face with a wrathful wife was a subject that had lent itself to comic treatment ever since men had been writing plays. Viewed objectively there *was* something comic in the situation. It was impossible to speak of it since Maggie was within earshot and almost within

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sight; but in their silent rolling of the eyes toward each other, as they clasped hands and Bainbridge got himself out of the house, there was gravity and sympathy and mutual comprehension, not unmingled with an element of acrid masculine amusement.

CHAPTER IX

“WHO is the interesting girl at the end of the second row on the left?” It was the first time Clorinda had spoken since entering the big room, in which the institutional smell of disinfectant mingled with the odor of Christmas boughs.

In spite of all efforts to the contrary the eight or ten visitors wore an air of compassionate condescension as they sat facing the three rows of so-called incorrigible girls who had been driven in dumbly to their annual treat. The treat was at the end of the room, behind the visitors—a pyramidal Christmas tree hung with festoons of tinsel and popped corn, illuminated by electric candles, growing sweets and fruits in exotic abundance, and springing from a soil of parcels. Twenty-seven pairs of girlish eyes observed it with cold, detached attention. It was part of the official routine, one of the pleasanter phases of a discipline intended for their good. It would yield them some candies to eat and a few useful things to wear. To this degree it was acceptable; but otherwise it was not a Christmas tree. Nothing could make it a Christmas tree. A Christmas tree was fun and freedom and spontaneity; it was giving as well as getting; it was saving and planning and contriving and surprising and taking an active part. Here nothing was asked but a well-behaved acquiescence, a stolid thankfulness, both of which

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could be given without a blink of the eye. "Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed," the beneficiaries seemed to say to their rescuers and patrons, "and nothing you can do will bridge it over."

It was the interval between two carols. The girls having exhibited their talents in "Good Christian men rejoice," were taking breath before beginning on another. They sat silent and blank. They were neither sullen nor rebellious nor hostile; they were only unresponsive. As nearly as might be their delicate bodies and haggard young faces and watchful, mysterious eyes were set to the passivity of a human stone wall against which mere kindness beat in vain.

Bainbridge, who was seated next to Clorinda, answered her question. The girl was Pansy Wilde, who had been handed over to the institution—now known as the House of Comfort, though the eighteenth century had called it the Asylum for Young Penitent Females—by the Juvenile Court. He recounted her experiences, more or less characteristic of those of her sister inmates. The child, for she was little more, had been in domestic service. From this she had been dismissed owing to a wilfulness of conduct incompatible with household propriety. When about to become a mother she had fled from home, taking refuge with a woman in Brooklyn, in whose house the child was born. To earn a living for herself and her baby Pansy had been put to shifts which Bainbridge's narrative passed over lightly to go straight to the tragic point. On returning one evening to the house where she roomed, Pansy had found the child dead. She had then been arrested for killing it. Of this crime she was acquitted. The charge proved against her was that, having been turned out of more than one house when it was found she

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had a child, she had concealed the fact by leaving the baby half smothered in her bed. Since, however, she was considered to have done what she could according to her opportunities and her lights, the judge had delivered her to Miss Merry, the deaconess of St. Mary Magdalen's, to be lodged in the House of Comfort.

"You're speaking of Pansy Wilde," said Miss Downie, the head matron, who sat on Clorinda's other side. "Ever since she came to us she's been just like that."

Just like that meant staring with wide, vacant, violet eyes that seemed to see nothing, or to see what others couldn't. She was a tall, slim girl, whose beauty and refinement made Bainbridge think—though he shrank from the comparison—of what Clorinda herself might have been at seventeen.

Miss Downie, a neat little woman about whom there was nothing of the jailer but two burning, vigilant eyes and a bunch of keys that jingled when she moved, continued to explain. She had had girls like Pansy Wilde before, though none that had remained in this dazed and docile state so long. "She's a bidable little thing, and clever; but you've got to tell her what to do every time it's to be done."

Bainbridge was impressed with the quality of emotion in Clorinda's tone as she said: "She reminds me of a wounded bird I once took into the house. I did what I could for it—but it was too stricken to find comfort in warmth and food. It needed something else I wasn't able to give it."

"Oh, well, she'll come round," Miss Downie declared, with confidence. "They all do, in the long run; and they generally thank us."

The girls sang another Christmas carol:

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"Oh, little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy sweet and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by."

It was hammered out with the hearty, shadeless, mechanical effect of a pianola, after which Bainbridge stood up and gave the girls a little Christmas "talk." It was a simple and affectionate talk, but it appeared to penetrate no deeper than the glory of the Christmas tree. The same unrelenting faces were turned toward the speaker, who, as far as could be judged from anything that met the eye, poured out his heart to a patient listlessness that had no capacity to receive his words. When they were ended Colfax Pole, a young-old man with exceedingly long, beardless features, and blond hair parted in the middle, handed the gifts to Mrs. Endsleigh Jarrott, the wife of the institution's treasurer, who presented them to each of the girls in turn, with smiles and nods and pats on the cheek, to which there was in no case a response. All the hilarity was on one side, all the demonstration. Even with their parcels in their laps the young penitent females sat apathetic, timorous, with no sign of curiosity or pleasure beyond a furtive sidelong look, or a shy, half-frightened smile. When the wrapped-up present Clorinda had selected for Pansy Wilde slipped from the girl's knees to the floor she didn't so much as stoop to pick it up. That was done by Miss Downie, who bustled forward with a jocosé word of reprimand that left Pansy as dazed and remote as ever.

"I want to speak to that child," Clorinda whispered to Bainbridge when the ceremonies were ended and the girls rose to troop out.

Bainbridge hurried away. In a minute he was back,

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leading Pansy lightly by the hand. "Pansy," he said, gently, "Mrs. Gildersleeve wants to speak to you."

It would have been difficult to say which of the two was the more terrified. Clorinda was unused to philanthropy. She had had no experience of the cheery, capable ways of those who set out to do good to others. All she could achieve was to look yearningly at the tall child before her, while Bainbridge, moved as he had never been moved by anything, looked at her.

"Do—do you like it here?"

"Yes'm—yes, miss."

Question and answer were stammered, futile. Because of a need of which she hardly knew the force to break the ice, Clorinda persisted, "Are—are you happy here?"

"Yes'm—yes, miss."

"No, you're not happy."

Something welled up in Pansy like a big, tearless sob. "N-n-no; no'm."

"You want to get out, don't you?"

"Oh, yes—I mean," she caught herself up—"I mean—I mean—oh, no—oh, yes—oh—"

"You'll be late now, Pansy, if you don't run away," Bainbridge intervened, fearing the effect of Clorinda's words. "Good-by. Mrs. Gildersleeve has been very glad to see you."

As the girl turned Clorinda stepped forward and touched one of the parcels Pansy held in her hand. "I gave you that. I—I want you to know when—when you wear it."

The last of the girls was filing out and Miss Scattergood, a scraggy, long-necked lady, with a face like a benevolent giraffe, turned to include Pansy in the tail of the procession. Miss Scattergood's keys also jingled as she moved.

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Clorinda stood as one transfixed till from somewhere in the direction of which the girls had retreated came a sound like the slipping of a bolt.

"Oh, they've locked them up!"

To reassure her Bainbridge smiled. "No, they haven't exactly locked them up. They've only locked the door leading from the open to the closed part of the institution. They have to do that to keep the mischievous girls from stealing out and running away."

She looked at him with an oblique pleading lifting of the eyes. "Come home with me. I want to talk to you—to have you talk to me—and I can't bear it here any longer."

She had never before addressed him in just this way, this appealing way, this child-like, confidential way, as if in some undefined sense she belonged to him. She needed comfort and for it looked to him. To whom else should she look? As he took his seat beside her in the limousine it was hard for him not to seize her hand.

She began at once, excitedly. "There's something about that child—about them all, but about her especially—that almost breaks my heart. I seem to see myself as I might have been if—if circumstances hadn't been different."

"Wasn't it John Howard, the Quaker philanthropist, who said, when he saw a man taken out to be hanged, 'There, but for the grace of God, goes myself'? You feel the same thing."

"No, I don't feel the same thing. That couldn't have happened, whereas this could. It's what *would* have happened, if I'd been in the place of any one of them." As the chauffeur turned the machine she confronted Bainbridge with a gesture toward the big brick building

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behind high walls from the lighted doorway of which they were moving away. "Isn't there any better method of helping them than *that*?"

His thoughts were so intently on her that he hardly knew how he answered. "There probably is; but the world hasn't found it yet."

"Then *can't* we find it?"

"That's considered very good, you know—as such institutions go."

"It's awful; it's terrible; it's—it's inhuman."

They sat turned toward each other. In the street lights he could see her eyes aflame. His voice seemed to him to come from far away. It would have been so much easier to say what was burning on his lips. "It may be inhuman, but it's neither terrible nor awful. You must remember what the poor little souls have escaped from."

"But they hate it."

"They hate the restriction; but unless they're restrained you can't do them any good."

"Oh yes, you can. There must be a way—a better way than that."

"Of course there's a better way than that, if you could get any one to take it. But you couldn't. An institution is only second best, or third best, when you've said all you can for it. But we have to use the means which the limitations of nature and society put into our hands. If Pansy Wilde weren't here, fed and clothed and taught and kept warm—"

She broke in fiercely. "She doesn't want to be fed and clothed and taught and kept warm. She wants love."

"Oh, we all want love—but it isn't necessarily good for us."

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"It is good, if it's of the right kind."

"Oh, if it's of the right kind, I agree with you. The trouble is—"

"The trouble is with ourselves. We haven't got hearts. What we've seen just now is the attempt to produce the effect of love by machinery. That's as effective as bringing up babies on artificial milk."

He was still not thinking of his words; he was thinking of her. Never before had he seen her wake like this to indignation and emotion. Through the crush of traffic on this Christmas Eve the car moved but a few yards at a time, to be subjected to long waits, of which neither took any notice. All the New York of old Greenwich Village seemed to be astir. The shops were doing an active trade; the footways were thronged; in the windows of faded dwellings there was here and there the lighting up of a Christmas tree. Newsboys shrieked the evening papers; the Elevated thundered overhead; from the bay came the not infrequent whistle of a ferry-boat or a tug. While it could hardly be said to be snowing, an occasional large soft snowflake drifted adown the window-pane. Bainbridge felt himself imprisoned with her on some secure, secluded isle, with an ocean to protect the refuge. "That's very true," he said, absently, as he watched the quiver of her mouth; "but we mustn't undervalue what other people have tried to do. We can't despise the methods of our fathers and grandfathers which we inherit, even though we feel that, to some extent, we've outlived them. A man who is half-way up a ladder mustn't scorn the rungs by which he's climbed; because without them he wouldn't be where he is."

"You said just now," she observed, after a minute's thinking, "that there's a better way, only that people

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wouldn't take it." She fixed him with the gaze of her deep, liquid eyes. "Why couldn't I?"

"There's no reason why you shouldn't—apart from the conventions of the world in which we live." He asked, before she could respond, "Do you know what I meant when I said that?"

"I suppose you meant what I mean. If we—if we need love more than we need anything else—anything else in the *world!*—then it—it must come directly out of some one's heart—and not from a corporation which is organized and supported by dollars and cents. We can't furnish love in that way any more than the Tibetans can get prayer by grinding on a prayer-mill. Isn't that something like what you meant?"

"That's *it*."

"And," she continued, breathlessly, "you think that in our present—our present—"

"Stage of human development," he supplied.

"—our present stage of human development we're not prepared to give the personal love, which is the only kind that the needy can be satisfied with. You think that, don't you?"

"It's what I gather—what I see."

"But some one must make a beginning, mustn't they?" She seemed to draw herself up in her corner of the motor.

"Very well, then. I will."

"You will—what?"

"I'll give love. I can," she went on, rapidly. "It's what I was made for. I've given you to understand that already, haven't I?—that time!—you remember!—"

"No, I don't remember."

"That's because you're so kind—you've put it out of your memory. But it's not what I want to talk about

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now. I only want you to see—what, I suppose, you do see already—but I want to be sure that you see—I hardly know how to put it!—that essentially I'm only that—that feminine compound which has been described as—as a great *lover*. There! I've shocked you now, haven't I?—and yet I don't mean to. There's a strong side to it, as well as a weak one—”

He said, with gentle significance, “You haven't shocked me, Clorinda.”

She seemed not to notice the use of her own name as she hurried on. “The strong side is that it's out of women like me that nature makes not only great wives and great mistresses, but great mothers. I should have been a mother. . . . I'm so much a mother that I could love almost any child as if it was my own. . . . I begin to think that perhaps I'm not a mother for the very reason that I might take some motherless thing—”

“If you mean Pansy Wilde—”

“If I mean Pansy Wilde it's only because the little creature wrings my heart. She's so like—like myself as I might have been at her age—as I *was*, in some ways—only that conditions hedged me in. But I remember—I remember very clearly. It was only fourteen years ago that I was seventeen, as she is to-day. And I wanted just what she's been looking for—I wanted love. I didn't talk about it; but I dreamt of it; I dreamt of nothing else. When it didn't come I married—but I kept the dream. It never came true—not in the way in which I dreamed it. It was always—always frustrated—as I told you—and you know.” He was about to say that she hadn't told him and he didn't know, but she silenced him. “No; let me go on. I want you to understand that I feel a kinship with these poor girls. We're of the same

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clay. I could have been like them; they could have been like me. It's for me to do what may be done, for one of them at least. If they'd let me take her—"

"Take her in what way?"

"To live with me—so that I could comfort her—heal her—be a friend to her."

"Have you thought of the difficulties that that would involve you in?"

"I know there'd be difficulties; but do you, of all people, advise me to shrink from them?"

"And have you thought of the capacity in which she'd be an inmate of your house?"

"I've thought of it vaguely. I shouldn't try to do anything absurd. I'd train her to be a kind of superior maid, or possibly—if she had the intelligence—I should have her taught to be a secretary. I should want her to earn her own living. . . . But"—a gesture expressed her impatience with this part of the subject—"all that is mere detail. The main thing is that my heart bleeds for her; and if I've got the means and the power to take her out of that place, and give her the chance she's never had . . ." She broke off again, to begin on another aspect of the theme. "Then I shouldn't feel so useless in the world. I shouldn't be so repressed. I *am* repressed. Don't you see I am? I always have been. I've always been like this—outwardly—stately and calm, and a lady. Oh yes, I've had to be a lady, no matter what else I was! but inwardly—don't think I'm wild or excited—I'm just telling you the truth—I've told you the truth before, haven't I?—inwardly, I'm raging fire."

"I've guessed as much as that—I've known it."

"Yes, of course you have. You've been the only one who could. That's why I feel so free to talk to you. No

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one would believe it; and yet raging fire is what expresses me. Only it's been fire like that of the volcano that burst open a few years ago—what was the name of the island?—Martinique, wasn't it?—a volcano that seemed so tame that no one thought it *was* a volcano. Grass grew over it, and trees; it was just a splendid, peaceful hill. Men climbed it, and children played on it; and then, one fine morning. . . . That's what I'm afraid of. . . . But this—don't you *see*?—this would open up a way for me. It would be just in my line—just the sort of thing I could do. Don't you remember my telling you how ashamed I was last summer to come away from Paris because there was no way in which I knew how to help? But I do know *this* way. . . . No, I couldn't do it like Claribel Jarrott and Colfax Pole—with grimaces and pretty speeches. I couldn't be a visitor at that place—or one of your charity-workers. *No*. I could only do it in my own way—by loving—by being loved—”

He was at the limit of his strength. Seizing the two hands with which she had been making little gestures as she spoke, he held them tightly. “*I love you, Clorinda; I love you. Let me bring what you're craving for.*”

She didn't withdraw her hands; she allowed him to hold them. She even leaned toward him, to observe him more closely. But he watched the blaze in her eyes die down as though something had suddenly put it out. It seemed an immeasurable time before she spoke. “*You!—a clergyman!—a—a priest!*”

“*I'm a man, Clorinda,*” he whispered, hoarsely.

She still allowed him to hold her hands, though the clasp grew limp. “*Yes,*” she responded, dully. “*You're a man; but I hadn't thought of you as a man in—in just this way.*”

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"In what way did you think of me?"

Her response came slowly. "I don't know. In as far as I've thought of you at all—personally—it's been very much as one might think of—of an angel."

She withdrew her hands quietly and slipped them into her muff. After sitting upright and eager she fell back into her corner of the motor with a silence that seemed to imply that the last word had been said. In the few inches by which he strained toward her Bainbridge felt that he was pursuing her through some long inward flight.

"But I'm not an angel, Clorinda. I'm just a man; and it's as a man that I love you. I love you like any other man; only that it seems to me as if there must be something higher and stronger in my love than—"

She murmured the words through half-closed lips. "Oh, I'm very sure of that."

"No, that isn't what I mean. I only say that that's how it seems to me—because I love you so much. Any man would love you with a high, strong love. I simply say that my love is so high and so strong that I feel as if nothing would ever equal it."

There was a kind of weariness in her tone. "And I dare say nothing ever could. Only—don't you see?—I never thought of it. I'd put you—put you, in a way, off the earthly list. I'd thought of you as my friend, in the same way that you're Maggie's and Leslie's—"

"Do you want me to understand that there's no hope for me?"

In the flood of street electricity he caught a gleam in her eyes like that of light moving under water. "I don't know what you mean by hope."

"I mean hope that you could love me in return."

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"Oh, that!"

"Yes, that."

He waited for her to speak again, but she said nothing. Instead, she leaned back in her corner with eyes closed. Having jerked their way up Seventh Avenue to Fourteenth Street, they were turning into it. The thunder of traffic seemed to roll away from the windows and doors of the car, leaving the two who sat within isolated in a kind of peace.

As the minutes were going by and she gave him no answer Bainbridge too fell back into the depths of the car. "Then's there's *no* hope," he said, quietly.

"You must let me think," she murmured, as if to herself. Suddenly she added, "What would you expect me to do if there was?"

He leaned forward again. "Marry me."

"Marry a clergyman? I?"

"Marry the man you—you loved. Wouldn't that be the way to put it?"

"It might be, if—if we could get things into such simple terms. But we can't."

"Why can't we?"

"I should think you'd see." A few seconds went by before she added, "For me to marry a clergyman is surely inconceivable."

"It isn't inconceivable that you should marry the man you love—if you do love him."

"And that raises another question—if I do."

"Do you know that you don't?"

"I don't know anything—of the conditions into which you've thrown me. It's all new to me, new and strange and—and wonderful."

"Wonderful?"

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"Yes, wonderful in that you could think of it—with regard to *me*."

"Oh, but it's just the other way. That you should think of it—if you do think of it—with regard to me—"

"How should I not think of it? When a man like you asks a woman like me to be his wife, the honor in itself is so great—"

He leaned further forward, looking into her eyes. "Honor? I don't understand."

"Oh, well, you would if you were in my place." She raised herself, and, drawing her hand from her muff, laid it lightly on his. "I wish I could tell you, dear friend, what it means to me. It means so much that it makes me afraid. It's like offering knighthood or a medal for distinguished conduct to a man who's been a coward in the battle. He might take it just because he's been a coward—and feel remorse for it afterward. That's one thing I must try not to do."

"Why try to do anything but what you spoke of a few minutes ago—just to love and be loved?"

Her smile, which merely dawned and faded, made him feel young and inexperienced. It was the kind of smile he had seen only in great portraits, and once or twice on the stage, the smile behind which lie memories beyond putting into words. "It's not so simple as that. It *might* be as simple as that with some one else—but not between you and me."

He tried to meet what he conceived to be her objections. "If it's because we're not of the same religion—"

She swept this aside. "That's only part of it, if it's a part at all. If I were to—to do what you want, I could probably conform to your wishes, outwardly at least."

"Then what are you afraid of?"

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"I'm afraid of myself. I'm afraid I may"—she held the word in suspense, letting it flutter out softly—"love you."

He seemed to cry aloud, not from strength of voice, but from the force of his emotion. "But if you do—"

"I can't tell. I hope I don't; but—but I may."

"Why do you hope you don't?"

"For every reason; for every *sort* of reason. I feel as if my love would—would scorch you—would burn you up."

"Couldn't you let me take care of that?"

"And then," she went on, ignoring his question, "there's something about you that puzzles me—that puts me out of all my reckonings."

"What is it? Whatever it is, I'll give it up."

She smiled, not as before, but sweetly and rather fondly.

"No, you couldn't give it up. It's—it's your goodness."

"Oh, but I'm not—"

"No, of course; not to yourself. No one ever is. But it's the way you seem to me; and I can't tell you how it mystifies me as to all I feel about you. You see, women are not used to dealing with good men—I mean men who've made a kind of specialty of goodness. They've no preconceived ideas to apply to them—nothing to go by. I haven't. The fact that you're what you are and I'm what I am reverses the usual position of a woman and a man. It makes me so humble—"

"Oh, don't say that," he pleaded, quickly.

"I must say it. If I don't you won't see how confused I am, nor what it is that confuses me. It's like looking at an object that stands too directly in the sun. You can't see its color; you can hardly see its shape. We human beings need shadows to show us the true values."

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"But, Clorinda," he protested, "I'm just like any other man."

"Oh no, you're not." She smiled once more, the fine luminous smile that lit up the delicate beauty of her face with tenderness and intelligence. "You're far from being like other men. You've a whole range of thought which most men don't possess; you speak a different language." She surprised him by going on to say, almost without change of tone: "Would you mind getting out when there's a convenient opportunity? With all you've been saying—and what we went through before that with the children—I'm rather—rather overwhelmed."

"I'll do anything you wish. But you'll let me come to-morrow?"

She reflected. "No, not to-morrow. It's Christmas Day and you'll have your services. Then you'll be dining with the Galloways. I shall be dining with the Colfax Poles. I was to have dined with Leslie and Maggie, but when they went away Colfax and Julia were good enough to ask me. Not to-morrow, then—but soon."

"How soon?"

"I can't tell you that. Probably very soon. When I've had a little time to myself and got used to an idea that seems so impossible to me now—"

"And I may call you Clorinda, mayn't I?"

"I'd rather you'd call me what you like—without asking my permission. I don't seem to have any permission to give. With regard to you"—again the sweet smile seemed to him what dawn is to summer—"with regard to you I'm only like a beggar at the gates. Do just as you please."

"Then I shall call you Clorinda—but only when we're alone—yet."

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"Yes; perhaps that will be better." She began taking off the glove of her left hand, speaking while she did so. "To-morrow is Christmas Day, and I've sent you some of the new books. No, don't thank me. I wanted you to see that I thought of you—and that I was grateful. But it isn't enough—now." She drew off a ring. "Here; take this." She slipped it into his hand. "It's only a ring—any ring. No one gave it to me; there's no sentiment attached to it; I bought it myself. But I want you to have it." As he bent over it and pressed the half-hoop of diamonds to his lips, she went on with feverish rapidity: "It doesn't mean anything—that is, no more than just to mark your extraordinary goodness. Do you remember my saying that I wanted to be put back where I was before? No, perhaps not," she continued, as he looked up and shook his head. "But I did say it; and I feel now as if—as if it had been done. Whatever happens after this—whatever decision I come to—the ring will tell you that—that something seems to have rolled away from me—that at last I've been set free." With a sudden pressure of the brake the car stopped near the curb. "Don't you think you could get out now?"

It was only after kissing her bared hand rapturously that Bainbridge found himself on the pavement, borne along in the Christmas crowd. He was dazed and ecstatic. He would have felt himself waking from a dream had it not been for the ring, with its diamond edges, cutting into his clenched hand.

CHAPTER X

BUT to fill in, or rather to reconstruct, his portrait of Clorinda was not, when Bainbridge came to do it, as easy as he thought it ought to be. The figure whom he had worshiped as a saintly image in stained glass had blurred the outlines in waking into life. She had both disturbed his vision and rendered it more marvelously beautiful.

That is, where he had beheld an ideal, woven of dreams and magic tissues, there began to emerge a woman who beset his senses because she was made of flesh and blood. Moreover he was conscious that in ways he couldn't understand she outflanked his mental range. Her very willingness to put herself at his feet was but the sign of something great in her; her habit of referring to memories between them of things of which there were no memories might have harked back to a common life together before either of them was born.

And yet when, a few days after Christmas, she sent for him, it was to show herself in an aspect in which he had not seen her heretofore—simple and domestic. Consciously or not she had chosen the early part of the forenoon as best suited to her purpose. While he waited in the library he heard her voice in the tiny room, a kind of office, that opened from it, where she was evidently talking to the cook.

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"So that's understood, Catherine. Not quite so much salt in the soups—and the next time we have an omelette I'll come to the kitchen myself and show you how to make it."

Bainbridge could not have said why these words should have been consoling to him; but a sense of consolation followed him when he was shown into the little room, where he found her seated at a desk which combined a suggestion of business with French eighteenth-century elegance. A large check-book lay open before her, and a pile of envelopes stamped for the post stood neatly beside it. Everything stood neatly. Among the papers there was no disorder; not a pen nor a pencil was displaced. He could see her as one of these women who cannot move without producing an effect of the finished, of the exquisite.

He received the same impression from her dress. Dimly he had expected to find her shimmering in green and silver, with emeralds and diamonds round her neck—or in one or another of the imposing robes she had worn at their previous meetings. Nothing could have been plainer than the short, black skirt of this morning, nor the long, open, white collar, a loose frill of lawn, that descended to the bust, where three large silver buttons, each carved as a different flower, formed her only ornament. Her hair, dressed low on the neck, displayed the shapeliness of the head; on her fingers she wore nothing but her wedding-ring.

She greeted him with gentle familiarity, without rising from the desk. In bowing over her hand and pressing it to his lips he was, though he scarcely knew it as yet, doing homage to this new conception of her as a housewife. The fact that she could make an omelette and pay her

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bills by check brought her down wholly from the stained glass and within the circle of women he might marry.

Her first words, too, were a relief to him. "Do sit down. I'm so glad you were able to come. I wanted to ask you about these attacks on Leslie and Maggie Paliser."

Having been half afraid of some such high note as that on which they had parted a few days earlier, he found the tone deliciously confidential and matter-of-fact. It was suited to the morning, to the cozy little room with its fire on the hearth, its miniatures and figurines, and the crisp, snowy air outside.

He seated himself in an arm-chair which relieved any feeling of over-fastidiousness in the surroundings by being homey and worn. It was not easy to bring his mind to Leslie and Maggie and their affairs; but he saw it as the tactful thing to do. "I didn't know they were still going on—the attacks."

"Yes; there's another article this week. It isn't worth while looking at it if you haven't seen it already; but I wanted to ask you if you can think of any way by which they might be stopped."

He reflected: "I don't *know* of any way; but we might find one."

"I talked to Endsleigh Jarrott about it yesterday. He said it was difficult. He didn't admit it in so many words, but I think he tried it once when there had been a lot about Claribel and a Mr. Searle. What he said was that there was no one to get at or to whom you could appeal. There seemed to be no real agent in New York and no one who would call himself responsible. He'd found it like fighting something in the air; there were no weapons by which you could strike at it."

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"So long as there's a public for that sort of thing—" he began, musingly.

"That's the curious part of it, that there's not only a public, but that it's largely made up of the people whose hearts are torn out, as you might say, and sold in the shambles. Endsleigh and Claribel, for instance, who were almost separated by it—there was some truth in the stories!—are still its regular readers."

"And there generally is some truth in the stories. That's another queer thing. Whoever the responsible people are, you can't often accuse them of lying. Take the case of Leslie and Maggie. Neither you nor I, who know them so well, had any idea that there were differences between them till they were brought up in this way."

He saw in her eyes that gleam which he had often compared to light moving under water. "I had," she said, simply. Unnecessarily she straightened the pile of stamped envelopes, the inkstand, the pen-tray, the small decorative objects on her desk, as she added: "At least I knew that Leslie wasn't happy. I didn't know that Maggie—that Maggie had noticed anything till she told us the other day."

Her embarrassment, the tinge of color in her cheeks, conveyed nothing to him but a natural reluctance in speaking of the troubles of her friends. "I hadn't the faintest suspicion of anything," he declared, frankly, "till I chanced on it in that paper. Even then I wasn't afraid of it, except in as far as Maggie might believe it."

"That's all there is really to be afraid of." She explained further: "Nobody we care about would attach importance to the matter. It's curious, the attitude people take toward that sort of thing. They love to read it;

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but they're neither shocked nor scandalized by what it tells them, and hardly disapprove. Then, too, as this particular publication never mentions any one but the people most in view, it's considered almost an honor to get into it, no matter how you may be pilloried. I've known women in New York—women you'd expect to be quite above that queer strain of vanity—who've been delighted to be noticed by it, even when it's been only in the way of some uncomplimentary remark about their ages. It's one of those odd American weaknesses that you don't find anywhere else. But, as you say, the trouble lies in the effect on Maggie."

He spoke with some perplexity. "Up to now I thought I understood her. I find, however, that—"

"That you don't," she broke in, with animation. "No, you wouldn't. Probably no man could. It's only a woman who understands another woman's desire to dominate."

"Oh, I understand that well enough—on Maggie's part."

"Yes, to the extent that you see her as an intensely dominating creature. That, of course, is her idiosyncrasy. Every woman isn't like that. But every woman does want to rule the heart of the man she loves. She wants to feel it hers—that no other woman has a part of it. Maggie may exaggerate this because of her exaggerated sense of possession in general; and yet it's fundamental to us all."

"If she'd only gone another way to work with Leslie—"

"Oh, I don't know. I'm afraid he would have eluded her in any case. No woman would ever"—her color deepened—"would ever hold him long. That may be because of the complex feminine streak in himself. It's

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the big, simple, masculine men who are always the most faithful."

Bainbridge wondered how in this listing she rated himself, but he said, merely: "Anyhow, I hope this trip to White Sulphur Springs may bring them together."

"It won't bring them together; but it may keep them from breaking further apart. They'll never be brought together till Maggie thinks she's got him under her thumb; and she'll never get him under her thumb till Leslie feels himself free. When he does that—if she'd let him do that—he might come into subjection of his own accord. What these paragraphs do is to keep open the wound in their relations by stabbing at it. If we could only stop them there'd be a source of irritation the less."

He found it happiness to sit talking with her in this intimate way—such happiness that the discussion meant more than the object. His remarks were made in that manner he had acquired since knowing her, a manner by which he could answer her questions and put forth his opinions quite lucidly, while really thinking of her, of the turn of her head, of the delicate molding of her wrist, of the distinction of her utterance, of the quiet grace of her movements. He could, therefore, not have traced the transitions by which after a few minutes he heard her speaking of Pansy Wilde.

"I've had time to think it well over, and to know just what I should like to be allowed to do. If they'd let me take her I should make her, at first, a sort of assistant to my own maid—to do sewing and mending and that kind of thing. That would give her a comfortable home and bring her right under my own eye. I've talked to Alphonsine about her, and got her sympathy. As a French-

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woman she's already interested in the heroine of what she calls a *drame passionnel*, however pitiful. After that we could see."

"You could see—?"

"How far we could go and what we could do. If the little thing was happy with me—and I think I could promise you that, without spoiling her or attempting anything foolish, I could make her happy—but if she was happy with me, we could then decide on what would be best for her—whether more training of a domestic kind, or more education, or what."

He thought it right to warn her. "You'd probably meet with all sorts of disillusionings and disappointments in Pansy herself."

"Oh, I know that; but it would be part of my work to wrestle with them, to circumvent them, wouldn't it? You see I don't want to go into this thing just sentimentally or as a fad; I want to give myself to the healing and restoration of this child as seriously as Miss Macy gave herself up to teaching Helen Keller. I dare say it may seem to you a great deal for one when there are so many—"

He denied this with a shake of the head.

"But I feel equal to it in the case of one, when more would frighten me."

"It seems to me all you should attempt."

"For the present, at any rate; only that there is something else. You say that Pansy has a widowed mother and some brothers and sisters."

He gave her the details of the family, adding that since the girl had fled from home, and had later been brought into court, the mother had not seen her.

"Then I should try to bring them together. I shouldn't

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try more than that. This would give me a chance to see—to see what I could do to help the mother—and to— to educate the other children, who must be young, since Pansy is the eldest." She clasped her hands and looked at him rather piteously. "Oh, don't laugh at me, or think me presuming or over-ambitious. You see I'm—I'm quite well off." She named the approximate amount of her income, going on hurriedly to say: "That's no enormous wealth according to the standards of New York; but it's more than enough for one, and I hardly ever give any of it away. Giving away money generally seems to me so aimless, and so—so futile."

He responded dreamily because each minute seemed to bring him some new revelation of her character. "I'm beginning to think it *is* futile in the majority of cases. Our philanthropies deal largely with effects rather than with causes, and so our generosity becomes a mere pouring of money into bags with holes."

"To me," she declared, "it seems so cold, so lifeless, to give money and not—how shall I say?—not accompany it with oneself. Do you see what I mean?"

"I think I do."

"You subscribe a hundred, or a thousand, or ten thousand dollars to a cause, and it remains just a cause—remote—impersonal. You don't see what becomes of your money; you've nothing to do with it. Other people spend it, whether usefully or not you've no means of knowing. It often happens that you learn in the end that it's been wasted. But whichever way it is, you're helpless: you're ignored; you're shut out. I've no doubt that in many cases it has to be like that; but I'm only trying to explain to you that for me it's not generally satisfactory."

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"I quite understand."

She smiled on him with what he considered an adorable humility. "You see, I want to—to go with the money; to have the money go with me, and not *instead* of me. I want to *know*—to make it not merely a dead gift, but a kind of—a kind of expression of myself. Oh, I dare say I'm very foolish—but it's the way I feel—the way I've always felt—and so, if you could help me again, as you've helped me in so many ways already—"

Fortunately the subject was one he could discuss with greater knowledge than the regulation of journalism. He told her of the different authorities who would have the matter in their hands. There would be the judge of the Juvenile Court who had sent Pansy Wilde to the House of Comfort; there would be the directors of the House itself; there would be Miss Downie; there would be Pansy's mother; last of all there would be Pansy herself. On Pansy herself he dwelt at some length, painting her in tolerably dark colors. She was likely to prove rebellious, refractory. You couldn't always judge by refinement of manner and dark violet eyes. In spite of these reassuring indications the heart could easily be wilful. If Pansy hadn't been wilful she wouldn't be where she was. Miss Higgins had given her a good home, and yet—

Clorinda broke in, pityingly. "Oh, that poor thing! I know she's a good woman and—and harmless; but I can't imagine any eager young girl being influenced by her, one way or another. You see, my interest in the matter is not in Pansy Wilde herself; it's in trying to help any one—*any one*—who's gone wrong in this particular way. This child appeals to me only because she's at the beginning of her troubles, and her experience has been so tragic."

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"That's true of them all. Each one of them has a tragedy behind her."

"Quite so; and if I hadn't seen Pansy and felt drawn to her, I could take almost any one of them at random." She passed in her elliptical way to another phase of the subject. "You don't object to my making the attempt, do you?"

"Of course not; it's only that, knowing the type of girl better than you do, I'm afraid you may find the whole thing discouraging."

"Do I strike you as a person who would shrink from discouragement?"

"No; but you might easily be baffled by Pansy's own inclinations. She might not be happy in your house, as she'd think of happiness, and then—"

"She'd be free. I should never attempt to hold her by force. If being a friend to her, a sister, didn't win her, I should admit that I had failed."

"And then," he began, with an apologetic smile, "one has to take into consideration the fact that—that you yourself might tire of the experiment—"

With one hand on her desk, and the other hanging over the back of the chair, she straightened herself royally. "Then you do think I'm going into it as a fad. I'm the idle rich woman seeking a new pastime. You don't know me."

He seized the opening to say: "I know you so well that I want to know you better. Isn't that the substance of what I said the other afternoon?"

"That's exactly the substance—for the time being. Suppose—" she began again, slowly, with meticulous care, to rearrange the objects on the desk—"suppose we—we left it at that—for now?"

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"You mean—left it all in the air?"

"That's a very good expression. If it were all in the air we should live in it—breathe it in—get used to it—or know whether we could ever get used to it or not."

"But I know that already."

"Oh no, you don't. This is one of the rare subjects on which I'm wiser than you. Believe me, you're not used to it. You see a vision in the clouds which you'd like to bring down to earth; but you don't know what it would be like if you got it there. Neither of us knows."

"And you suggest—?"

She turned to him with a smile in which he found a mingling of tenderness and radiance. "Isn't it very nice as it is—like this? You're free to come and go, and to know that we have this secret between us—while we both test the possibilities—"

"And would it be like that for long?"

The smile faded. If her gravity did not become a frown it was because of her inexpressible gentleness. "No; and it needn't—it needn't be like that at all, if you'd be content with the answer—"

He hastened to interrupt. "I shall not be content with any answer that doesn't give me the thing I most want in the world."

"If the thing you most want in the world is—is what you asked me the other afternoon, then I'm not sure whether I can ever give it to you or not. As I said then—I *might*. But if so, you must—you must give me time. If you can't do that—"

"Oh, but I can," he declared, eagerly. "I want you to have all the time you need; and in the mean while—"

"In the mean while, you mustn't urge me. You must let me feel free. You must feel free yourself. If it should

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come to you that—that you'd made a mistake in asking a woman like me to be your wife—”

“Oh, don't!” In spite of the fact that the edge of the cry was tempered by a smile, the protest in it was unmistakable.

Her own smile returned, less radiant, it seemed to him, than a few minutes earlier, but more tender. “Then I won't. That part of it is over. I shall not go back to it again. I see—I see that to—to keep referring to it might easily become—become intolerable. Besides,” she stumbled on, brokenly—“and this is one of the most wonderful things about it—the fact that you can dismiss it from your mind makes it possible for me to dismiss it from mine. I realized that the other evening in the car. I said so, didn't I? And I've felt it ever since—as if something had been rolled away, as if a weight had been taken from my heart.” She went on so rapidly that he had not time to be bewildered. “But now we understand each other, don't we? We'll let this—this great thing *be*. We'll just live. We've plenty to do—things that will bring us together. You'll come and see me whenever you like—and whenever I want you I'll write or call you up—and if at the end of a few weeks we see—”

He felt it to his advantage to rise. “Let us have a few weeks first,” he said, hastily. “Don't let us prophesy or make arrangements. As you say, let us live—with this great thing, as you call it, in the air—between us—to breathe in.”

CHAPTER XI

ON the basis of this pact Bainbridge passed through a number of weeks which remained in his memory as a period of poignant, high-strung happiness. Many factors entered into it, factors through which his personal aims were in a measure carried out by a great impersonal striving.

It was that moment in the winter of 1915 when America awoke with amazement and pain to the fact that the world was in agony and calling on her for aid. It was true that aid had been given in the previous summer and autumn, but as to the victims of a vast catastrophe, another and nightier Messina or St. Pierre. The war was to last a few weeks, or a few months at most. It had been supposed that the need once met would be over. But the dawn of that new year was also the dawn of a new phase of perception. It began to be seen that the need was not only urgent, but that it would remain urgent. Once met, it had to be met again; being met again, it had to be met again. Pain presented herself as the companion figure to War and spoke in words of even more imperative command. Pain brought her sister Want. Pain and Want together lifted up their voices in a cry such as no man living had ever heard the like of. Bainbridge was one of the millions of his fellow-countrymen who listened and were thrilled.

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As a young man with a young man's energies he at first took the call to be one for his physical strength. There were ways in which he could serve that would be quite in keeping with his spiritual office. In the capacity of ambulance-driver or stretcher-bearer his spiritual office would, in fact, find wider opportunities. Had he been able, during this stage of the excitement, to wrench himself free from his duties, not even his love for Clorinda Gildersleeve would have held him in the humdrum round. The need of American men, of American money, having presented itself flamingly in the early days of that new year, it was with difficulty that he kept himself from leaving all to answer the appeal.

Since there were reasons why calmer counsels should prevail, he did what he could at home. Within a few weeks his work transformed itself from the parochial to the universal. From ministering to a decent class of more or less fashionable folk, with sins and sorrows not less acute because they were those of people of means, he found himself a champion of men. New York shriveled up; Fifth Avenue became a thread; his thoughts were daily and hourly with men and women he never knew, in desolated towns he had rarely, if ever, heard the names of. Never in his life had he been so active. He was on all kinds of committees; he addressed all kinds of meetings; in spite of his views as to the futility of giving away money, he poured his means into all kinds of funds. He came into view as one of the apostles of a new world-brotherhood, which was perhaps the more startlingly a brotherhood because guilty of the crime of fratricide.

He was at that time in his thirty-third year, and as fully at home in his surroundings as if he had been born and bred in New York. From New York, too, he was

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getting that notice which intelligence and single-heartedness seldom fail to exact from the crowd. His slight figure with its rapid movements, and glowing face with clean-shaven, somewhat ascetic, and distinctly aristocratic features, was easily recognized in the streets, and his name was often in print. Men approved of him soberly, while women commended his small, keen blue eyes that looked right through you, and thick fair hair in which they saw a ripple like that made by a summer wind in passing over a grain-field, as helps in treading the narrow way. Of such comments as these, however, or of any comments at all, he himself was scarcely more aware than a locomotive of the opinions of the passengers it drags along.

For in his present activities he had the joy of drawing nearer to Clorinda and of seeing her in other lights. It was one of his first discoveries that in the new movements of help she took a part that surprised him. She might have been classed among the many American women who had waked from a state of idleness and helplessness. With the needs of other countries reacting on the needs of their own, there seemed to be born in them a new consciousness. The sense of being useless with which she had returned from Europe having passed, she became suddenly energetic and effective. What she lacked in experience she made up by intelligence. While keeping to the background in the undertakings to which she lent her efforts or her name, she came, nevertheless, to be recognized as both fertile in suggestion and whole-hearted in devotion.

To Bainbridge she appeared also to be rested. Something he could only call life-weariness had dropped away from her. One might have said that after long and fruit-

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less seeking she was satisfied. Satisfaction brought with it a peace which showed itself not only in her manner, but in her voice and countenance. It was impossible for him to reckon it as other than the peace that springs of love.

So throughout January they worked together to get money, food, clothes, doctors, nurses, and hospital necessities. It was work of such immediate pressure as, for the minute at least, to make their more intimate desires seem far away. They did not forget them or ignore them; they only allowed them to recede. They allowed them to recede, but to loom up in the distance, splendid, noble, hedging them round, as the hills stand about Jerusalem. It was characteristic of Bainbridge that his courtship should be conducted through what he could do for others; it was equally characteristic of Clorinda that she should accept his approaches in this way, when she might have shrunk from methods more direct. All through January their references to the "great thing" between them were by implication only; though each knew of the other that it was never absent from the consciousness.

And yet Bainbridge was not so immersed in new undertakings as to forget the marital rescue of Leslie and Maggie Palliser, or the social salvation of Pansy Wilde.

With regard to the former he could only feel his way. When the partially estranged couple returned from White Sulphur Springs he did his best to divert them from mutual reproach by engaging their services on behalf of the suffering. Though by this means he occupied their time, he could do little to diminish the sense of irritation which each produced on the other.

"So long as Maggie accepts as gospel everything printed by that rotten sheet," Leslie declared, doggedly, "it's no

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use for me to take any steps toward a reconciliation. We live in the same house; I dare say we shall go on doing so; I make the concession for the children's sake. Otherwise I can think of no greater happiness than to be quit of this damned big establishment—and on my own again."

"So long as there's another woman in Leslie's life," Maggie insisted, with sorrowful determination, "you needn't speak on his behalf. I did what you asked me to, Arthur; I went away with him. But I couldn't go so far as not to see the papers, and—well, we don't gain anything by talking. When you think of what Leslie owes to me, the least, the very *least*, you might have looked for was that he should have remained faithful. I don't say," she added, with her gasping sob, "that he should have loved me; but between that and spending my money on other women there's a difference."

"My God, Arthur," Leslie exclaimed, on another occasion, "it's the money. If I had two thousand dollars a year of my very own I could swallow everything. I could pay for my clothes at least. But I don't make that since I gave up my work at Columbia, either by my lectures or my books—no one wants to pay for political economy!—and so I have to take her checks. When she gives me one I feel as if I was handling a live snake; but I've *got* to do it."

"You haven't got to do it in that way," Bainbridge endeavored to explain. "Between a man and his wife there is, properly speaking, no such thing as money. Money is only a counter. It stands for something not itself. When you've got that, old boy—"

"Ah, but when you haven't?"

"You set to work to acquire it. One can, you know. Once you've done it, it won't matter whether the money

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was originally yours or Maggie's, because that aspect of the thing will have lost its significance."

"It's easy to say that when you don't know the humiliation."

"If you want to be free of the humiliation, Leslie, old chap, you must put yourself where it can't reach you."

To Maggie he said: "You see, Maggie, you detract from your own personality by laying so much stress on mere cash. You turn yourself into dollars and cents, and then wonder why Leslie doesn't go into raptures over the sum total."

"I turn myself into the thing Leslie cares most about."

"If he cared most about it he'd never have sacrificed his independence."

She laughed scornfully. "Sacrificed his independence? I wonder how? A man who has a mistress hasn't sacrificed much that I can see."

"Let us keep to one thing at a time, Maggie. Leslie sacrificed his financial independence, and he did it to please you. I wonder if you have any idea of what that means in the case of a man as proud and sensitive as he is? He could never have done it if he hadn't believed that between you and him there is no such thing as money."

"No such thing as money? My dear man, how you talk!"

"Yes, there you are. But what is money? Is it anything more than the token of exchange? Once you'd got the equivalent of money the money itself had no further meaning."

"If you put it that way, the equivalent of money is love, and Leslie has never—"

"No; the equivalent of money is life, and that's what

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Leslie has given you. He's put his life in your hands. It's for you to make of it what you will."

"And how about my life in his hands?"

"Exactly the same thing. I'm not saying that Leslie has done his duty by you any more than that you've done your duty by him."

"I haven't done my duty by him? Well, I like that!"

"You *think* you've done it because you've given him so much a year. What I'm trying to point out is that you can't interpret your relations to each other in terms of money; that money has no meaning to you and him; that life is all that matters to either of you. When you understand that the spring of your action toward Leslie—whatever he's been or has not been to you—must be blessing and not retaliation, you'll begin to get hold of your duty by the right end; but you won't do it before that."

If there was a result from these exhortations it was not immediately apparent.

From his efforts to stop the publication of paragraphs in which the names of his friends were mentioned in jocular familiarity there was no result at all. He penetrated on one occasion, to what purported to be an office, in a sinister-looking yellow building, very far east in Twenty-fourth Street. Here a young man, with grim, tight, snapping mouth, and wary, restless eyes, was tilting in a revolving-chair, picking his teeth, but otherwise doing nothing. Bainbridge having stated his errand without mentioning the names, the young man, who kept his hat on his head and retained his position in the revolving-chair, replied, vaguely: "Well, that wouldn't be in my department."

"Then in whose department would it be?"

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The young man waved the toothpick gracefully. "I couldn't rightly say."

"Would it be possible to find out?"

"I dun'no' as it would be." He brought the chair to a level position and went on, confidentially. "Say, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll ask Miss Beans. She's the stenographer, but she ain't here to-day. Leave your address, and I'll let you know."

Bainbridge did not leave his address, but, returning at a later date, he found Miss Beans. She proved to be a tired little woman, of delicate features, and a tremor of the lip that portended tears.

In answer to Bainbridge's complaint she spoke prettily and sympathetically. "Oh, dear! that would be Mr. Davis's department, and he's now in the West. He'll regret it *so*."

"Hasn't he left any one to take his place?"

"Well, no, he hasn't. It's very inconvenient when anything of this sort happens. We feel it *so*."

"Couldn't I wire him?"

"You might if we knew where to find him, but we don't." She seemed struck with a bright after-thought.

"But I'll tell you what I'll do. Will you not leave me your address and I'll write to him, if I can find out where he is? It will please me *so*."

In the end Bainbridge was obliged to bring back a discouraged report to Mrs. Gildersleeve. He had noticed that Clorinda took his success or his failure in these attempts, of which there had been a good many, as a matter of personal importance. If her own name had been involved in the hints that found their way into print she could not have been more intensely concerned. It was only when he broached this subject that he ever

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nowadays saw in her eyes that fear which used to be so regular a visitant.

But fear was almost instantly displaced by cheeriness. "Never mind. They can't go on with it forever. In a few months' time it will have blown over. I've noticed that. They seem to get tired of keeping at the same set of people too long. Their readers must like a change."

"The odd thing is the way in which they get their information. I should think it must come, from the servants."

"It comes from some one," Clorinda contented herself with saying.

"If we could only get at *them!*"

"Yes, if we only could we should stifle the thing; but we can't."

In the matter of Pansy Wilde he was, however, more successful, directing his efforts first toward the judge who had consigned the girl to the House of Comfort. The judge was a small, elderly, frosty-faced man, with a long upper lip which he made longer by the pursed-up, concentrated movement of his mouth in listening. From his manner of the bench, detached, unbiassed, a little severe, he might have been born in his office.

He tapped soundlessly on his desk while making his points. "In considering this matter there are three things to which we must give our attention—discipline, training, and a reasonable certainty that the work shall go on for a stipulated time. What can you say of these?"

"I think I can promise all three, even if not in quite the same way that they would be given at the Home."

"If the result is achieved, the method is immaterial.

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Be so good as to tell me how we can be sure that the end will be attained."

Bainbridge endeavored to be clear. "The lady I speak of is a person of considerable means living in Madison Avenue, between—"

"We're not concerned with her residence; it's sufficient that you give me to understand that she's a woman of benevolent intentions. Have the goodness to inform me of what expectations we can entertain that she'll carry her intentions out."

It was not in one interview alone that Bainbridge gained his object; but he gained it. After a fortnight's hesitation, and close scrutiny of Mrs. Gildersleeve's request, the judge granted a permission contingent on the willingness of the mother of the girl and of the matron of the House of Comfort to agree with it.

Miss Downie's opposition was more tenacious than the judge's, because less reasoned out. "I never heard of such a thing," was the argument she found most cogent.

"No, nor I," Bainbridge admitted, frankly; "but the world is full of improvements we never heard of thirty years ago."

"Of course the child's unhappy," Miss Downie agreed, vehemently. "Who wouldn't be unhappy after such an experience as hers? But what's a little unhappiness when it means her salvation? *We* know what we're doing, and we know what will be the result."

With her convictions, her experience, her zeal, her burning eyes, and her bunch of keys, she might have dissuaded Bainbridge from his purpose had he not been working for Clorinda. "I'm not thinking of Pansy altogether—"

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Miss Downie perceived her advantage. "So I see; but I am."

Ignoring the irony, though not without a flush, he went on: "No one can know better than yourself the good which such work as yours can do for the worker—"

Again Miss Downie pounced on him. "This is a home for unfortunate girls who've got into trouble. It's not a plaything for fashionable ladies who are bored with everything else."

Miss Downie never yielded, but she was overcome. She was overcome by a consensus of the more modern-minded among the directors in favor of the new social experiment to be tried on Pansy Wilde. This coalition happened to be backed by a timely misunderstanding, resulting in "words" between Pansy and Miss Scattergood. Pansy's ability to flash out in "words" was taken as a revival of her broken spirit and as a menace to the institution's future peace. As, moreover, the circumstances made it difficult for the head matron to support her second in command, and still more difficult to desert her, it became the easiest way to give to Pansy's withdrawal some of the aspects of banishment. No more remained for Bainbridge than to secure the consent of Mrs. Wilde.

The difficulty here was to make Pansy's mother speak in a manner that could be called decisive. It was plain to Bainbridge that the poor woman thought she could escape from the disgrace of the family situation by disowning it. It was not less plain to him that in disowning it she took the course for the excellent reason that she couldn't see what else to do.

"I've stood all I can on account of Pansy," she declared, in a dull, sorrowful voice, "and now I'm about

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sick of it. I've rose above it, anyhow. If I hadn't, I don't know where I'd ha' been. I've got my other children to bring up and keep respectable, if there's any way of doing it, which I dare say there ain't, and that's all I've got to say."

"But it isn't all you've got to feel, Mrs. Wilde."

To this there was no reply during the minute it took her to lift the cover from a big round pan, cut off a lump of dough from the larger quantity "rising" within, and begin lightly to rub it in the dab of flour on the rolling-board. "What I've got to feel is my own affair," she said at last. "If I can stand it nobody else needn't mind."

"Unfortunately we can't always choose what we shall mind and what we shall not. When we know you're in trouble we want to get you out of it."

Taking the rolling-pin, she rolled her lump of dough till it was flat and thin and oval. "I've seen a lot of getting people out of trouble, and what it's generally amounted to has been making 'em bear their trouble in somebody else's way instid of their own. If I've got trouble I guess my way of taking it is as good as the next one's."

These observations were made not bitterly or perversely, but with quiet, dignified resignation. She was a massive, motherly woman, made for the peaceful, homey ways of Lisbon, New York, whence she had sprung, rather than for the fight for life in a poor quarter of the metropolis. Bainbridge, who as a curate had worked much among the poor, knew how to judge them at a glance by the mere aspect of their surroundings. In this kitchen-living-room there were neatness and cleanliness and none of the more terrible indications of want. Since the

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children's supper had to be prepared, the mother went on with her task not only of necessity, but because the occupation of her hands relieved her overstrained nerves.

Bainbridge was purposely making his visit late in the afternoon, so as to find her on her return from work. With his faculty for being at home in any surroundings in which there was need of him he sat without embarrassment at the end of the table on which his hostess "baked," which was, indeed, the only place she had to offer him.

"I've no doubt of that," Bainbridge agreed, in response to Mrs. Wilde's philosophy, "and yet if you have troubles I suppose you don't object to their being made lighter. The lady who's willing to take Pansy—"

Mrs. Wilde cut fiercely into her superficialities of dough with an oval cutter, repeating the operation wherever she found space. "A lady has taken Pansy already, and see what's come of it."

"Quite so; and it's because we do see what's come of it that we're looking for something else."

"They've put her where she is without asking me. Why can't they take her out in the same way?"

"Because there was no responsibility in putting her in, whereas in taking her out they want to be assured that they have your approval."

Doubling the small ovals she had cut, she placed them side by side in a baking-pan, making two rows of three. Her mouth quivered as she spoke, though she did her best to maintain an air of detachment. "She wouldn't so much as tell me who the man was, so as I could go and beg him to marry her or have him into court. She liked better to bring disgrace on us; but we've rose above it. I've got my other children to think of

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and bring up respectable. Pansy can go where she likes and do what she likes, for all I—for all I—”

Bainbridge saw two great tears beginning to trickle from beneath the heavy, handsome lids as he finished, softly: “For all you care. Is that it?”

She rolled the fringes of dough into a tight little ball, dabbing it into the flour on the board. “When a pitcher’s full it’s full. You can’t put anything more into it.”

“And your pitcher was full already—full of trial and sorrow. I understand that.”

“Pansy had no need to add to what I had to bear,” she declared, rolling her small cake flat and doubling it to lay beside its fellows. “She didn’t so much as ask me to forgive her. She just wouldn’t tell me the man’s name, and ran away. I couldn’t run after her. I had my other children to take care of, and I didn’t dare to leave ’em. If you blame me for that—”

“I’m not blaming you for anything. I’m only saying that now that we have a chance to make things better and easier all round, it would be well to use it; and we can’t do that till you agree.”

“I don’t see what you want me to agree for. I’ve got nothing to say to it one way or t’other. If you’d stood all on account of Pansy that I have . . . and that old Miss Higgins pretending to be so fond of her, and yet letting her out nights to tramp the city with the Lord knows who. . . . If I could find out his name I’d have the law on him—a child of seventeen!”

“Isn’t it possible that on that point Pansy has been wiser than we have? What good would it do us, after all, to know who the man is? We could only punish him by making her troubles more public; and she’s had a pretty hard time as it is. You know that, don’t you?”

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The mother turned sharply to the stove, whence she took a cup of melted butter that also held a pastry-brush. By the time she had returned to the table the proud lip had stiffened sufficiently to enable her to say: "I don't know anything about it, and—and I don't want to know. If I'm to bring up my other children respectable I must rise above the whole thing."

"You can't rise above anything by turning your back on it and refusing to know what it is."

She was painting the inside of her rolls with melted butter as he went on pitilessly, "After the baby was born poor little Pansy went to work too soon."

He allowed this information to sink in while she cut off another lump of dough from the main stock in the big round pan.

"Her first job was in a candy-factory. She had to give it up when they found she had a child."

More flour having been sprinkled on the board, she began again the process of dabbing the new lump into it.

"She was turned out of her rooming-house, too, and had to move to another. But here, when they heard the baby cry, they wouldn't let her stay the night."

The proud, meek features twitched as the lump was rolled to a flat oval.

"She had to move two or three times after that, but always with the same result. She could hide her baby for a day, and sometimes for a day or two; but they found she had it, in the end, and then she had to go."

"Oh, stop!" The cry was that of a great mother-animal. From sheer need of personal activity she worked the cutter desperately. "I'm her mother. I can't stand it."

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I've been hard on her, but I didn't know what else to do. . . ."

So Bainbridge broke down the cold, fierce pride that passed for respectability at Lisbon, and the last barrier but one to Clorinda's coming to the aid of Pansy was taken by assault. There still remained the last barrier of all, which was Pansy's own consent.

CHAPTER XII

THE inclination of Miss Scattergood's head on a long neck that broadened to its base was exactly that of a giraffe's. "If you'll be good enough to sit down I'll send her in." She added, over her shoulder as she reached the door: "I think I ought to tell you that she's impertinent. She's a pretty child, and in some ways bidable; but she's impertinent." As further information she said, when she had reached the hall, "We haven't told her anything, so you'll find it all to do."

Because Clorinda was frightened and nervous and unused to Homes she said under her breath, as Miss Scattergood withdrew, "Oh, that woman!" For the same reason, she murmured, "Oh, how dreadful!" as she looked round the room.

Bainbridge laughed. "It's only dreadful to a super-sensitive taste. As a matter of fact it's very clean, and—"

"Clean, yes. I've never seen anything so clean in all my life. It's clean to the point at which your soul cries out for dust. And this odor"—her delicate nostrils quivered—"this smell of discipline"—she gave a little sniff—"of disinfectant"—she sniffed again—"and of good will—it's so characteristic of the methods of Christian love imparted by machinery that I should have recognized it even if I didn't know where I was."

Bainbridge loved the new freedom of speech she had

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begun to allow herself when alone with him. He loved this way of going about with her, with interests in common like those of man and wife. "You'd find the machinery necessary," he laughed again, "if you had thirty wayward girls to take care of."

"But I shouldn't have them. It would never have occurred to me to try anything so clumsy. I'd do what I could for them individually or I should make no attempt at all."

"I suppose it was the no attempt at all that our worthy forefathers were afraid of. I can imagine that they had as much scorn of Christian love imparted by machinery as you and I—only they understood that it must be that or none."

She continued her inspection of the room. "These are interesting, these old lithographed heads. They must date from the thirties and forties." She worked off some of her restlessness by passing from portrait to portrait, reading the names. "That's a Stuyvesant, the old man with the neckcloth; this old lady who looks like Queen Victoria's mother was a Rintoul—must have been some relation of mine; that's a Jarrott; that's a Van Tromp. It's curious how the old names persist, even in New York." She wheeled round from the walls toward the middle of the room. "These Chippendale chairs are good. Must have been the wreckage of some fine old home—or possibly discarded and sent here when the mania for machine-made furniture took possession of our fathers and mothers about 1850. But who could have covered them with rep of one shade of crimson and set them on a carpet of another? Isn't that symbolical of the whole system? Excellent intentions gone just a little wrong. Ah!"

The exclamation was caused by the sound of the

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slipping of a bolt. "She's coming," Bainbridge whispered, the smile passing from his lips as he withdrew to the background to let Clorinda carry out her task alone.

He judged this, best, for the beginning, at any rate. Since the responsibility was to be hers, it was well that she should shoulder it from the first. He slipped into a corner, therefore, barricaded, as it were, behind one of the Chippendale chairs which he held by the back. Clorinda stood in the center of the room, beside the marble-topped table, on which lay an immense, heavily bound Bible, her eyes fixed on the empty doorway.

They could hear the shuffle of Pansy's steps along the corridor. She was not coming lightly or blithely. They could tell by the way in which she dragged herself along that she had no thought of approaching deliverance.

When she appeared at last in the cavernous dusk of the hall, her face was as white as her blouse. An old wine-colored skirt hung limply and dejectedly about her little person. A wine-colored tie, faded and carelessly knotted, was but the relic of past coquetry, like a stained and bedraggled flower that has once been in full bloom. Her hands hung heavily at her sides. In the staring of her wide violet eyes there was the fear of some new twist to the net that had enmeshed her. The dull stupefaction of suffering was in the degree to which her lips, lovely in spite of their bloodlessness, fell just a little open.

Mute and questioning she stood on the threshold, not daring to enter the room. Like a spirit conjured up from unimaginable depths, she seemed to ask why she had been sent for. There was something piteously dignified in the demand.

Bainbridge had no difficulty in reading what was passing in Clorinda's mind. Her stilled attitude, her sudden

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pallor, her helplessness and speechlessness, made it clear. Because she knew the details of the child's history as she had not known them on Christmas Eve, she felt herself dumb before so youthful an incarnation of tragedy. It was beyond what she was prepared for—beyond belief. For a space of seconds that seemed long the two women, since woman Pansy must be called, confronted each other in silence.

When Clorinda found voice at last it was with strange huskiness. "Pansy," she said, abruptly, "I want to know if you'll come and live with me."

In the wide, vacant eyes there was no sign of comprehension or response.

Clorinda continued as best she could. "I'm—I'm sorry for you, Pansy. I know what you've been through, and I want—I want to help you."

On the spirit called up from the void of its despair the words made no impression.

Clorinda struggled on. "I don't believe you're happy here; I know you're not happy. If you'll come with me—"

There was a movement on Pansy's part, but only that of shrinking back into the dimness of the hall.

Bainbridge came forward from his retreat and whispered: "Hadn't you better put it a little more plainly—less emotionally—and more as a lady looking for a servant? Put it on the ground of a new place, a new job. That's something she'll understand."

As he withdrew again behind his chair Clorinda made a fresh attempt. "You see, it's this way, Pansy. I'm looking for some one to help my maid, and I've thought—I've thought you would do. It would be a nice place for you, and I should see you all the time. My maid's name

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is Alphonsine. She's a nice woman. She'd be kind to you. She'd show you how to do things, to sew and mend, and things like that." She racked her brain for a list of inducements that would sound natural. "You'd have a room to yourself—and good wages—and not too much work to do—and—"

Pansy's voice from the hall was deep and startling. "And an afternoon out?"

Clorinda hesitated. "Yes," she said at length, "an afternoon out—with some one."

Again the depth of Pansy's tone gave tragic intensity to her words. "Some one to watch me?"

"Not to watch you, Pansy—to take care of you. You wouldn't mind that, would you? If I had a daughter of your age I should want her to be taken care of when she was out in the street. I should do for you exactly the same as for a child of my own."

"Would they know about me—the other girls in your house?"

"No one but Alphonsine, as far as I could prevent it. She's a motherly woman, a Frenchwoman—and Frenchwomen don't—don't feel about—about such things—like Americans. They're often kinder—and have more understanding—"

"I won't go." The declaration had tears in it rather than defiance. "They'd find out. Some one would be sure to tell them. Then they'd look down on me."

"But I don't look down on you, Pansy. Can't you see that I don't? You wouldn't be living with them. You'd be living with me."

The girl's relapse into silence was like the sinking back of the summoned spirit into its abyss. For the minute Clorinda, too, was at the end of her persuasive powers.

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It was not that she had no more to say, but, her heart having been always locked on the sort of thing she had now to utter, she found it difficult to open it.

Divining this inability, Bainbridge again stepped forward. "Won't you come in, Pansy? Mrs. Gildersleeve wants to talk about it seriously. We must look at it all round—with its advantages for you, and its disadvantages."

Pansy advanced slowly, not so much timidly as distrustfully, and not so much distrustfully as with the conviction that whatever promised good could be nothing but a trap. She came straight, however, and without hesitation, till there was only the marble-topped table between Clorinda and herself. Her attitude was again that of the spirit mutely asking to know why it has been called.

The child's suggestion of being too deeply sunk into misery to be able to rebel against it was what finally touched Clorinda to the quick. Awkwardness and the lack of habit vanished suddenly from her consciousness. Her heart was not precisely unlocked; it flew open of its own accord.

"I know about you, Pansy, and—don't you see?—that's why I'm here asking you to come with me. It's because you've done the things you've done that I want you. That seems strange to you, doesn't it? but it wouldn't if you knew all about me. It doesn't seem strange to Mr. Bainbridge here; it really isn't strange at all."

The effect of these words on Pansy was to make her open her eyes wider, with a look in which incredulity struggled with amazement. Once more Bainbridge thought it wise to intervene. "It isn't that Mrs. Gildersleeve thinks you've been right, Pansy, but only that



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you've been unhappy. It's the unhappiness that counts with her just now, not the right and wrong. They can wait; we can think of them later on."

Though Pansy remained speechless, her eyes had the wide-open, innocent blankness of the flower from which she took her name.

"And I understand you," Clorinda went on. "That's something in itself. We know it was wrong, don't we? but it isn't what we've got to think of just now, as Mr. Bainbridge says. They tell us we don't have to punish wrong—that it punishes itself. But what we have got to do is help each other when the punishment has overtaken us. That's what I mean when I say that it's because you've done what you've done that I want you. If you hadn't done it you wouldn't be in trouble; and if you weren't in trouble you wouldn't want *me*. If a baby needs things it cries; and when it cries any one with a human heart wants to go to it and do for it the things it can't do for itself. That's a little how I feel now, Pansy—"

Bainbridge hastened to interpret. "What Mrs. Gildersleeve means is that she has this excellent place to offer you, in which you'd have a good home. If you want to take it we've arranged that you shall be free to do so. The judge has said you may—and Miss Downie—and your mother. But of course we can't compel you. If you'd rather stay here—"

For the first time a gleam of intelligence shot through the pansy-like eyes. She seemed to understand that the opening door could swing to again, as her bosom rose and fell.

"If you'd rather stay here," Clorinda broke in, rapidly, "it would be because you didn't understand what I'm

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offering you. It is a good place; we could make it so. In that I'm sure you would meet me half-way, as I should meet you. You'd have Alphonsine as your friend, and if you were afraid of the other maids—and I don't believe you'd need to be—you'd have me. Then there would be a certain amount of liberty—an afternoon out, as you say—and regular wages, so that you could help your mother and the other children at home. Besides that you'd have something else, something I hardly know how to put into words, except that it would give you the chance to rest—to get strong again—to think— No, I don't mean to think of the past," she explained, hastily, at sight of the girl's look of alarm—"but to think of the future—to plan for it—to look forward to it with hope. You wouldn't refuse that, would you?"

There was nothing to precede or herald Pansy's sob, no trembling of the lip or preliminary dash of tears. It was in fact a tearless sob, a mere convulsive moan that subsided as suddenly as it began, leaving her as before. It was less startling to Bainbridge, who was familiar with most of the tricks emotion can play, than it was to Clorinda. "But, Pansy, I don't want to frighten you or make you cry—" she began, stammeringly.

Pansy flung herself on the chair that stood beside the table, her arms outstretched across the Bible, and her hands clasped as if in some violent prayer. She was still tearless, possibly because she had no more tears to shed.

"I didn't do it," she muttered, in her deep, tragic, unchildlike voice; "I didn't kill it . . . the baby. . . . I—only hoped it—it would die."

Clorinda was on the point of throwing herself on her knees beside the girl when Bainbridge put out his hand

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and stopped her. "No; let her go on. She wants to tell us—to tell some one. It will ease her mind, and do her good."

Pansy went on again, hoarsely, looking straight before her, pouring her confession into the air. "I didn't do it . . . I wouldn't have done it. . . . If it had lived I'd have taken care of it as well—as well as I knew how. . . . I only hated it. . . . No, I didn't hate it. . . . It was like something I loved and hated at the same time. . . . It was so little and . . . and helpless . . . but it had eyes like his and I knew it would have his color . . . hair. . . . It was born with a lot of hair . . . all downy and soft. . . . It was a little boy . . . its name was Lionel . . . Lionel Lemuel. . . . I called him Lemuel after poppa . . . and Lionel because I liked the name. . . . I wouldn't call it *his* name. . . . I didn't know what it was. . . . I found out it wasn't Gussie . . . he just give me that name to fool me. . . . I was afraid it would grow up like him . . . and so I hoped it would die. . . . But I didn't kill it. . . . They said I did, but I didn't. . . . I thought of it two or three times . . . but I couldn't . . . I didn't know how. . . . I couldn't do anything to it with my own hands. . . . Once when it cried in the night and give me away in the house where I roomed in Bradshaw Avenue, I thought I'd—I'd choke it . . . but when I took hold of it, it was so little—and soft—and helpless—I—I couldn't. . . . He said if I'd do it he'd—he'd bury it—but—"

"He?" Bainbridge questioned, gently. "Who? Its father?"

She nodded, keeping her eyes raised and staring off into the distance. "He come to see me once. . . . That was when I was in Mooney Street. . . . I was there three

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days. . . . It was the longest anywhere. . . . I sent him a post-card and he come that night. . . . He said he was going to light out to the West . . . where his wife was."

"So he had a wife?"

She nodded again. "I didn't know that till—till it was too late to do any good. . . . He said we was engaged . . . and that he'd marry me . . . and give me a set of fox furs . . . and buy me lunches . . . and take me to Coney . . . and everything like that . . . and then I found out he was married . . . and so when he come that night, and I told him I'd been turned out of so many places when they found out I had the baby, he said—he said we must—we must make away with it. . . . He said that if I'd kill it I wouldn't have any trouble with it afterward, because he'd carry it off in my suit-case . . . like I brought it in. . . . But I couldn't kill it . . . and then he got mad and said he'd do it himself. . . . So he took it out of the bed. . . . It was sleeping awful sound, because a girl I knew who'd had a baby of her own had give me some drops to put in its milk . . . but when I saw him take it up . . . it was an awful small baby . . . it didn't weigh no more than five or six pounds . . . and me not having the proper food for it . . . and having to drag it about . . . and keeping it shut up in the suit-case for an hour and more at a time when I had to move . . . I just let out one awful scream and snatched it away from him. . . ."

"You wouldn't have hurt it, then, for anything?"

"No, sir; not when it was right up to me like that. . . . But he swore something awful . . . and said I was trying to ruin him because I was under the right age . . . and that I'd made him throw up his job at the paper where

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Miss Higgins used to send me with the things she wanted to have printed in Chicago. . . . That's where I met him . . . he used to be there when I went with the things for Miss Higgins . . . it was always him who took them . . . in Twenty-fourth Street . . . down by the East River . . . "

Bainbridge glanced toward Clorinda, who had not recognized the significance of these words. "A big yellow building—the fifth floor—an office at the back."

"Ycs, sir." She spoke as one hypnotized. "Kilroy wasn't his real name . . . no more than it was Gussie. . . . Gussie Kilroy was just a name he give me. . . . I don't know what his real name was . . . and that's why I wouldn't tell momma. . . . Momma was awful mad . . . but what was the use—*then?* . . . Momma has been a reg'lar crape-hanger about me, anyways . . . never wanted me to have a good time. . . . You couldn't get him when you didn't know his name . . . and he was married, besides . . . and so I just made up my mind to take my medicine. . . . I knew that if I could get rid of the baby I could go reg'lar bad, like Mary Swett . . . a girl I used to go to school with. . . . They let her stay in Mooney Street, though they knew what she was . . . but they wouldn't keep me because I had little Lionel . . . I always liked his name . . . and so I had to go to Tyke Street, where it was something fierce . . . and the drops I used to put in the milk give out, and I didn't know how to get any more . . . and the baby got fretfuler and fretfuler . . . and I was trying to find out about homes where I could put it . . . or some woman who'd take it to nurse. . . . But no one didn't know anything . . . and I was afraid to ask . . . and it was getting too big for the suit-case, though it kept so awful

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small . . . and all I could do was to bury it right in the middle of the bed when I went to work. . . . I got back to it every minute I could . . . and so long as I had the drops it didn't hardly stir . . . it seemed to get to depend on them like. . . . But *that* day I couldn't get away at the lunch-hour . . . a lot of extra work had come in to the laundry . . . and old Steptoe what run it said that any girl that went out to lunch could stay out to lunch . . . and I'd had such an awful job to find a job after they bounced me from the candy-factory . . . and so everything was against me . . . and when I got back to my room and turned down the bedclothes I just let out onc awful holler . . . and I didn't know anything more till I woke up and found I was—in—in jail."

The recital ended, her head dropped on her arms and she cried softly. There was no passion in her grief—nothing but the gentle weeping of a heart relieved of part of its load. Clorinda passed round the table and laid a hand on the quietly heaving shoulder.

"I shall come for you to-morrow morning, Pansy dear. You'll be packed and ready by eleven, won't you? That's understood."

But Pansy quivered at the touch. "Don't have nothing to do with me," she sobbed. "I'm better here. It's all I'm fit for. I did kill it—in my feelings—sometimes. I dare say I'd have come to it, if I got desperate—and I was pretty near desperate, anyways." She raised her head to add: "When I turned down the clothes the poor little thing had wriggled itself over on its back, trying to get its breath like. It didn't die from nothing but want of breath—that and not being rightly fed. Its eyes was wide open, and it seemed to be saying: 'Oh, what did

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you go away and leave me for?" I can hear them words just as plain as if the little lips had spoke them."

Bainbridge and Clorinda drove up Seventh Avenue almost in silence. It was snowing and raining at once, and the only words uttered were as to the necessity of having the windows of the limousine up or down. They were nearing the house in Madison Avenue when Clorinda said, tremulously:

"I don't see how the mother could have left the poor little soul to shift for herself like that."

Bainbridge answered with the sad thoughtfulness with which he always came away from dealings with the poor. "That's probably because you can hardly imagine what it is for the overtaxed human heart to be at the end of its resources. You've always got your resources to fall back upon—resources of money, of intelligence, of friends, of a vast upholding civilization all around you. You can't conceive of yourself as positively not knowing which way to turn or what to do—with two other children dependent on you for their supper to-night and their breakfast tomorrow morning. There are millions of the poor living with literally no margin, I won't say of food and money, but of affection and thought. Everything is used up for the wants of every day. And so when an additional misfortune, such as that which happened to poor Pansy, comes on them, they can only let it come. They're like the exhausted Alpine traveler who hears the avalanche falling and can't care enough to get out of its way. When you see Pansy's mother you'll find her typical of thousands upon thousands of mothers all over the world—the women whose daily stint taxes them to the limit of which they are capable, and who have no reserve with which

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to meet an extra demand. They're not callous; they've only given all they had."

"And we don't lift a finger to help them!"

"Some don't; others again. . . . But it's a vast subject, one through which we don't see our way as yet. Our attempts are too often a mere scratching on the surface, when we need to get down to the depths. While we're afraid to go to the depths—and the philanthropic world is afraid of it—our aid is more or less thrown away. I'm coming to believe that philanthropy only aggravates the evil; that industrial readjustments and compromises between capital and labor are no more than new patches on old garments, making the rent worse. But so long as our civilization is unwilling to tackle the subject by the right end—" He broke off, to ask: "Then you don't think of changing your mind?"

She turned toward him, her eyes shining through the dusk. "Because of what she's just told us? Why should I? It's what I should have felt, and been tempted to do, in her place. I seem—I seem to have been through it all—to have had it actually happen to me." A few seconds went by before she continued: "Condemnation by others is bad enough; but self-condemnation is the most frightful thing of all. It's always with you; there's no loophole by which you can get away from it. It's because poor little Pansy's problem is at bottom so much like my own—"

His brows went up. "So much like yours?"

"Surely you must see—you of all people!—that money and social position have no bearing on souls. Her soul and my soul—" As the motor drew up to the door she prepared to descend. "Come in," she said, as she gathered up her wraps. "Tea will be ready, and we can talk

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about it then. I shall tell Hindmarsh not to let any one else in. There's so much I want to say to you." She was actually getting out of the car, the door of which the chauffeur held open, as she turned to say over her shoulder: "I've—I've decided about—about what you asked me on Christmas Eve."

As Bainbridge remembered this moment afterward his mind seemed to stop thinking to enter on the blankness of suspense. As to what was before him he could scarcely hazard a conjecture. Since they had last driven up from old Greenwich Village together she had held the balance so evenly that whether she told him she could or she couldn't marry him he would feel it was what he had expected. All he could do was to brace himself inwardly to face what he was convinced would prove the great issue of his life. Consciously he prepared himself for that worst, out of which he must know how to make the best. If she were to inform him that she had tried to bring herself to it, but in vain, he must still see that in knowing her at all, in loving her, he was on his way to that Highest Possible which he had always made his aim. In this, as he got out of the car and followed her up the steps, his spirit seemed to act while his intelligence stood still.

She went before him swiftly, speaking a few words to Hindmarsh at the door, and proceeding directly up the stairs. He himself waited for Hindmarsh to relieve him of his overcoat, hat, and stick. He recalled an exchange of friendly remarks with Hindmarsh, a slim young Englishman, of the indoor servant class, with a bass so deep as to be ludicrously out of keeping with the task of arranging teacups and passing plates. It was perhaps to put off the terrific moment—whether of joy or disappointment—as long as possible that he

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took his time in crossing the friendly hall, and looking round on it as one who might be seeing it for the last time. He noticed the shaded lamp, a soft blur of colored light, burning in the empty library, the dark opening to the dining-room, the bit of blue-green tapestry, the portrait that might have been a Gainsborough. At the first turning of the stairs he glanced lovingly at the cucumber green of the celadon jar on its carved black stand, not because he felt the mysterious appeal that emanates from old Chinese art, but because the beautiful thing had so often seen him go up or down in hope or happiness. All the uncertainty of the prisoner coming in to hear the life-or-death verdict of the jury was in his footsteps, in his heart, as he continued his way upward. Of one thing only was he sure: Whatever the fate, he was inwardly prepared for it.

He had passed the turning of the stairs when he fancied he heard a man's voice from the drawing-room above. Having gone up a step or two farther, he paused and made himself sure of it. The stairs had a second turning—not spacious and at right angles to itself like that which made room for the celadon jar, but a mere arc of a circle whence the upper hall and a portion of the drawing-room were visible. Clorinda was in the portion of the drawing-room which was not visible; but standing before the fire, with a hand on the white marble of the mantelpiece, and directly within Bainbridge's range of sight, was a man.

He was a man whom Bainbridge knew instantly he had seen before, and yet was for the moment unable to place. He was a tall, broad-shouldered man, with a handsome, rather sensuous face, on which the mustache and im-

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perial were very slightly touched with gray. As Bainbridge lagged on the stairs his immediate thoughts were: "Where have I seen him? What connection have I with him?" Close on these questions came the realization: "It's an unusual connection; something dramatic and romantic." The idea was no sooner in his mind than the name came staggering, as it were, to his lips: "It's—it's Malcolm Grant."

Of the clarity of Bainbridge's vision during the few seconds it took him to mount the remaining steps and cross the hall there could have been no possibility of record. In thinking it over afterward it came to him that the difference wrought in his consciousness was as instantaneous as that which came over darkness and chaos when the divine "Let there be light," was commanded. It was illuminating—it was complete. It was complete—it was in order. Nothing was wanting; nothing was obscure. It was as obvious as the visually panoramic or as lines in print.

Clorinda was the veiled woman who had come to him more than three years previously. She had had a lover. She had described herself as a sinner.

Malcom Grant had wished to marry her, and had been deterred by God only knew what misgivings on his part or hers.

During the months since he, Bainbridge, had known her as Clorinda Gildersleeve she had tried to reveal her identity—she was under the impression that she had revealed it.

The fact that she had this impression explained a hundred references, a hundred speeches, that had bewildered him, but which were as clear to him now as chaos was clear when light flashed upon it.

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To her the beauty of his asking her to marry him had been in the fact that he *knew*.

Very well, then; he must know. He had no doubt now as to what constituted the Highest Possible. She must never learn from a hint that should escape him, or so much as a glimmer in his eye, that he hadn't read her from the first.

Having come to this consciousness before reaching the threshold of the drawing-room, he was able to cross it as one who faces no more than the commonplace. Clorinda was still standing, a little dazed, perhaps, but with no outward trace of embarrassment. Without bravado or affectation of self-control she was sufficiently mistress of herself to assume from the first the fact that the two men had met before.

"You know Sir Malcolm Grant," Bainbridge heard her saying, as he entered the room. It reached him, too, as if from a long way off, that she added: "He's passing through New York on his way to buy horses for the Canadian contingent to the British army, and has been good enough to wait to see me."

CHAPTER XIII

IT was plain to Bainbridge that Sir Malcolm Grant's astonishment at this unexpected meeting was not less violent than his own. During an instant for which no polite conventions or instincts of courtesy could possibly have been sufficient, the baronet's handsome, rather expressionless face went blank. He offered his hand mechanically as Bainbridge extended his.

"I—I took the liberty of waiting for Mrs. Gildersleeve," he stammered, as though an apology had been demanded, "when they told me she was expected home to tea."

"Quite so," Bainbridge assented, aloud. To himself he was saying: "If Clorinda marries me he'll think that I've been a traitor."

And yet the Canadian's words gave him the keynote he was mentally in search of. The meeting was to be on the basis of the simple sociabilities. There were to be no explanations, nor any implications that each of the three held a world of thoughts in reserve. Bainbridge was able, therefore, to go on with a series of obvious remarks, to ask the baronet how long he had been in New York, and to learn the name of his hotel. In a voice that seemed as if it might have been transmitted from another sphere he heard Clorinda say:

"How hot it is here! They'll bring tea in a minute. Why don't we all sit down?"

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The heat of the fire gave her an excuse for seating herself at a distance from both her guests, almost at the other end of the room. It made no difference, however, to either of the men, of whom each dropped into an arm-chair near the blaze, too deeply preoccupied to think of physical discomforts. It was noteworthy, too, that each kept his eyes on the other, with a scrutiny for which their dull questions and replies made no pretense of being an expression.

"You've come straight from Montreal?"

"As far as the station is concerned. As a matter of fact, I come more directly from Valcartier."

"Valcartier? Isn't that a training-camp?"

The Canadian described the vast, muddy plain on which some thirty thousand of his compatriots were preparing to take part in the struggle convulsing the world. He did so graphically and with eyes glistening. It was a theme that took him out of himself. "We're not saying much about it," he went on, "but we hope to have fifty or seventy-five thousand in the field by the end of the year, of whom thirty thousand will sail from Quebec as soon as navigation opens. Been recruiting in all parts of Quebec and Ontario. Been in the maritime provinces, too. They've their own training-camp in New Brunswick—"

"Splendid that you're able to work like that," Bainbridge interrupted, in a tone that tried not to betray an absence of thought.

"Doing nothing at all as compared with some fellows," Grant complained of himself. "At forty-four I'm too old to make it worth while to fight, when so many younger chaps are keen to go. Be taking the place of a more active man. Have had nothing but the humiliating job of getting others to do what I shirk myself. Only thing

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I've been able to contribute is cash—till lately they discovered that I know a thing or two about horses. It's a bit rough to feel yourself a slacker when half the fellows you know are shedding their blood; but it seems the best I can do."

In the end Bainbridge found it possible to follow such remarks as these with one side of his mind while with the other he confronted the seething mass of facts in which his destiny had become involved. As far as he knew his state of mind he felt like a man who has been gallantly and joyously sailing over an exhilarating sea and suddenly finds his ship sinking. His one clear bit of consciousness was of the necessity of keeping calm, of betraying no overwhelming sense of danger, of living that particular minute as a man should live it, no matter what was to happen in the next. The instinct to save the women and children, which at such moments men otherwise quite unheroic find within themselves, enabled him to talk casually with Malcolm Grant, while Clorinda had leisure to take off her gloves and lay them out neatly on the table beside her, unpin her veil and place it with her gloves, and otherwise get her bearings.

As if with a similar man-instinct Malcolm Grant kept to the topic that had been started as the least personal one he could choose. It had the advantage that to both Bainbridge and Clorinda it was new and to some degree arresting.

To the clergyman's spiritual insight, too, the Canadian was the first instance of that miracle of which he was already hearing tales—the man transformed, and in some measure ennobled, by devotion to one of the great causes emphasized by the war. As he sat silent, or asking no more than the questions that would spur the other man

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on to talk, his recollections of the scene in his own study, now of nearly two years ago, struggled up to the surface one by one. He remembered how obvious had been in this well-nourished figure, this handsome, fleshy face, the traces of the club, the race-course, and the place of business. The man had been a fine animal, and little more. He might never have missed a meal, never have suffered a care, never have balanced a reflection. If in the countenance the sensuousness was clean, Anglo-Saxon, and sympathetic, it was sensuousness all the same. It was of the earth earthy. Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die, might have been its motto at the time and its future epitaph.

And now there was a change. It was not merely that the form was more spare, the mouth perceptibly graver, and the eyes more thoughtful; there was an evident step upward in the scale of being. It was as if a soul were being born where there had been only a body; as if the hero was making himself manifest where there had been nothing but a man. Even if it was the hero in will rather than in deed, one got in him a glimpse of those never-to-be-recorded heroisms which would forever make this epoch memorable, and in which the Canadian, by the sheer force of nationality and co-operation, was in some sense a participant.

So the difficult minutes passed and Hindmarsh brought the tea on a silver tray. "Put it here, Hindmarsh," Clorinda ordered, indicating the table beside her. "Sir Malcolm, how shall I give you yours?"

Bainbridge found himself gravely questioning as to whether this preference made the baronet the greater stranger or the more honored guest. It was a minute at which hints that were really nothing seemed to have a

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meaning. There were so many things for him to think of that, for the moment, at any rate, it was only through trifles that his mind could work. When Grant stepped forward to take his cup Bainbridge watched to see whether he and Clorinda would exchange glances or allow their hands to touch. When they did neither he reminded himself that Grant had only wanted to marry her; it was not he who had been her lover. "My God! she's been a man's mistress!" He was obliged to repeat the words, and repeat them again, in order to assimilate the fact.

She had been a man's mistress—and he was supposed to have known it when he asked her to be his wife! She had been a man's mistress—and he whose life was devoted to the sanctities was in love with her!

Whose mistress had she been?

The question surged up slowly out of the heaving chaos of his spirit, only to recede and go down again. It receded and went down because Clorinda said, "Mr. Bainbridge, I think you like it weak, with cream and no sugar."

She made the statement looking at him—looking at him confidently—looking at him significantly, and with the faintest, yet most eloquent, glimmer of a smile.

He forced himself to return the smile and decline the tea, while it came back to him that the veiled woman had said: "There was a man! . . . if he had only insisted more . . ." And again: "What really happened was with some one else." How many men had there been, and how far down did his own name come on the list?

He could not have said that as yet he was suffering acutely. He was too bewildered for active suffering, too

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confused. The thing that was to make him suffer was too monstrous. To connect it with the high-bred woman, whose thin, graceful hands were moving so deftly among the objects of silver and porcelain, was too great a strain on the faculties. It was absurd, incredible, and yet . . .

"I'm afraid," she said, as Grant seated himself near her, "that we must seem very idle and callous to workers like you."

"Not a bit of it," he replied, readily. "We're very much touched by your sympathy and all your help."

"It's true," she said, pensively, "that one's friends' troubles are not one's own troubles, however keenly one may sympathize. To those engaged in the fight that fact must give this whole country an air of aloofness, but I assure you some of us are very deeply moved."

It was the inevitable subject, and as Bainbridge listened he was thankful that it should be so absorbing. No private drama could be thrilling enough to blunt the appeal which all mankind seemed to be putting forth simultaneously, so that there was neither affectation nor self-compulsion in the ease with which Clorinda and her guest were able to dismiss other concerns and give themselves up to the topic.

Outwardly Bainbridge found her little short of marvelous. Except for the first few minutes of seeming dazed at finding her unexpected visitor, she had remained mistress of herself. She had neither blanched nor betrayed undue self-consciousness. Only a woman with some exceptional blend of courage in the character could have so borne herself in the face of the actualities. As far as the eye could judge, she was as calm, as simple, as if Malcolm Grant had never impressed her imagination,

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as if there had never been on his part some humiliating flight, or on hers some strange refusal. Was it his flight or her refusal that had brought matters between them to an end, after the interview between Grant and himself, in the study in West Forty-eighth Street, two years before? It had been the one or the other—but which?

While he tried to postpone all such speculation to a minute when he could give himself up to it without restraint, it forced itself, in spite of his efforts to keep it back. Who was she? What was she? What extraordinary episodes had she passed through in that life of hers that seemed outwardly so placid and yet so violently disturbed within? How was he to subdue this flaming thing to his own patient round of well-doing as a clergyman? Was it possible to think of her as going regularly to church and being a gentle, comforting hostess to dull parishioners? Raging fire she had called herself. "I feel as if my love would scorch you—would burn you up," she had said on Christmas Eve. Well, would it? Could it? Was there something baleful in her against which his spiritual defenses wouldn't be able to hold out? Or was there a way, a way he didn't see as yet, by which the Highest Possible might still be reached, and be reached through her, in spite of everything? He had said to himself, on entering the house, that whatever the fate in store for him he was prepared for it; but had he been prepared for this?

Oddly enough, it was preparation of which they were speaking at the tea-table as their words floated over to him in his place by the fire.

"Rum go," Grant was saying, as he munched a slice of buttered toast, "my being off to Kentucky like this. Sort of thing I never expected."

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Clorinda responded sympathetically. "But you must be very glad to be doing it. At a time like the present anything by which one can be useful is a positive boon to oneself." She added, thoughtfully: "And as far as that goes, isn't all of life a rum go? I can't think of anything that will upset calculation, and defy it, so skilfully as the march of events."

"Thing is," the baronet stated, as though he were distilling an original bit of wisdom, "to be prepared for the unexpected, which is what I'm afraid good old England—"

"Yes, but what is being prepared?—for anything?—"

"Well, in England's case—"

"Oh, I know what it would have been in England's case—guns and shells and shoes and that sort of thing. But I'm thinking of ourselves. One gets so outmanœvered by life, so to speak, so taken by surprise. It's as if we were the prey of some grim and sportive power that had nothing better to do than play tricks on us."

Sir Malcolm seemed to ponder the possible bearing of this speech on the present curious meeting. "Of course one year is different from another," he conceded.

"Oh, but it's the *ways* in which it's different! If one could only guess beforehand, or be ready. You can't even reckon or forecast with any likelihood of being right."

That Grant was searching for hidden meanings Bainbridge was sure from the way in which he looked at her.

"Isn't it a matter of reaping what one sows?"

"No, because one doesn't reap it—not as far as I can see. One sows an acorn, let us say, and one reaps the deadly nightshade."

"Why not say a rose?"

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Bainbridge saw her look toward himself, with eyes curiously shining. "Well, I'm willing to say a rose—on certain occasions. My point is only that you never can tell. Whether it's a rose or the deadly nightshade, it's equally surprising when you're looking for an oak."

"And would you rather have the oak?"

"One would rather have what one is prepared for, wouldn't one? One doesn't always want to be hurled about, from one astonishing situation into another—"

It was Grant who threw the personal note into this. "I hope you don't mean my coming and waiting for you this afternoon. It was a bit cheeky on my part—"

"Oh dear, no," she tried to answer lightly. "I'm so glad you did."

"You see, I've only this one day—just now."

"Does that mean that you'll be coming back?"

"Not exactly coming back; but they may send me here as a sort of agent to the Canadian government—for buying supplies. New York's the most central point for that, and they've asked me how I should like the job. I told them to move me about as if I was an inanimate object." A new flash came into his eye as he added, quietly: "All I am and all I have is at the country's disposal."

The flash was answered like a signal by one from her. Bainbridge knew how this sort of engagement in a great adventure would appeal to her. "Of course," she responded, warmly. "It would be—but it's splendid, isn't it? It's like taking part in a great sport, which is more than a sport because it's vital. If this country went to war it might revive some of our old-time patriotism. I should like to hear a little of that now, after so many

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years of hearing our own people condemning our own country. And yet," she reflected, "it comes back to the personal, doesn't it? Life is so amazing. It sends its sorrows—and its joys—from quarters whence one so little looks for them. That's what impresses me. I keep wondering whether we're mere flotsam and jetsam, that have nothing to do but toss in the current; or whether there's anything that will steady us and take us along a definite road with some amount of confidence." She glanced toward the fire, so as to include her other guest. "Mr. Bainbridge, do you know?"

The question forced Bainbridge out of himself, though he was not ready to join in a conversation in which he had no heart. Moreover, he divined on Grant's part an impatience of his presence, while he considered it only fair to give his rival—if they were rivals—the one opportunity that could come to him. "Do I know what?" he managed to ask, after a second in which he seemed to stare at her unintelligently.

"Do you know how we, as individuals, can be prepared to meet the surprises of which life keeps such a vast variety in store for us?"

Bainbridge took up the theme only because he was obliged to. "What do you mean by being prepared? If it's the elimination of fear—"

"Well, perhaps it is," she agreed, promptly. "I never thought of it before; but if preparedness, as the word begins to go, means anything, it means that. The elimination of fear! If we could only reach that state, personally and nationally! But we can't, can we?"

Again Bainbridge answered only because he could see she spoke a little feverishly, and he was eager to do his part in steering the conversation safely. "We can, if we

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go by the right road—which is what very few people will do.”

“The right road to eliminate fear? Why, surely, if there is such a road it’s the one we should all like to take. If we weren’t afraid, it would be because we knew we were safe; and if we were safe”—she laughed with the slightest hint of excitement—“if we were safe, why it would be—it would be bliss. Do tell us how to find the way.”

“Not now.” He endeavored to smile, rising as he spoke. By way of getting out of the room still on the wholly non-personal note he continued, as he went forward to take his leave: “Preparedness isn’t a matter of explanation so much as it’s one of life. You can’t prepare by fits and starts; neither can you prepare for one thing and neglect another. It’s got to be a big business and a thorough business and a long business; but when you’ve given yourself up to it—”

“Then what?” the Canadian asked, looking up at the clergyman, who now stood beside the table.

“Then you can feel tolerably—secure.”

“But secure against—how much?” came from Clorinda.

The reply was more to himself and his own inner needs than to his companions, as Bainbridge said: “Against practically all we have to dread.” With deliberation, because he was thinking of himself, he went on to enumerate: “Against—against horror—against difficult situations—against loss of nerve—against not knowing the right thing to do—and—and—” his voice dropped slightly—“against not being able to do it.”

Clorinda clasped her hands. “Ah, but that would be heaven!”

“Well, yes,” Bainbridge agreed. “If the kingdom of

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heaven is within you, why then, as you said just now, you can be safe." He held out his hand. "I'm afraid I must go now—"

"Oh, *don't!*" There was a plea in her tone which sounded as if she felt herself in the presence of some form of danger. Her own ear seemed to have caught it, for she added, at once: "Do stay and talk to us. You've said there was a road to safety; but you haven't told us what it is. Won't you?"

"Not now. Some other time—if you should really want to know. Don't ask me unless you do; and it's probable you don't."

Still eager to detain him, she exclaimed: "Oh, why do you say that?"

"Because very few people do want to know it. We're all agog for preparedness as long as it's a toy or a fad; but we're a volatile people both nationally and individually. We're subject to hysteria, and so we make our efforts mere flashes in the pan. Real preparation is continuous and basic; and the continuous and basic are what most of us don't want. But, if you'll excuse me, I really must be off . . ."

He had forced his farewells and turned to make his way to the door, when he heard Clorinda say, with a clear precision of tone which was in itself a token of distress, and possibly of something more: "Perhaps I ought to tell Sir Malcolm Grant before you go away that we—Mr. Bainbridge and I—are—are engaged"—she hesitated an instant before adding, as if to make herself irrevocably understood—"to be *married*."

As Bainbridge turned again he saw Malcolm Grant rise from his chair with a look which could only be described as thunderous. It was directed not so much

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toward Clorinda as to Bainbridge himself. "Then I suppose I must congratulate you both."

The sincerity of the words was contradicted by the anger which seemed to shake the Canadian's huge person—an anger before which Clorinda momentarily quailed, rising and seeming to shrink from the baronet's proffered hand.

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CHAPTER XIV

ON his way home Bainbridge dropped in at Grant's hotel, and wrote:

DEAR SIR MALCOLM GRANT,—If you are at leisure this evening; may I ask you to look in on me at my house, as I have something of importance to say?

Yours sincerely,

ARTHUR BAINBRIDGE.

At half past eight the Canadian arrived. That during the past two or three hours he had gone through some violent emotion Bainbridge could see from his dark-streaked pallor as well as from the hunched, weighted carriage of his shoulders. "I got your note," was his only form of greeting as he strode into the room and stood still.

"I'm glad you've come," Bainbridge said, quietly. "There are two or three things I wanted to say."

And yet they were seated for some minutes on either side of the smoldering fire, in the relative positions of two years earlier, before Bainbridge had mastered himself sufficiently to begin. "I want you to know," he forced himself to say then, "that anything that's new and— and astonishing to you in our present situation is just as new and astonishing to me."

The expression Bainbridge called thunderous had not left the banker's face. It hung there like a great cloud,

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lowering and full of storm. "If you want me to know anything," Grant said at last, "you'll have to speak more plainly."

"I don't want to speak more plainly than I can help—"

"Hasn't the time for delicate niceties gone by?"

"Possibly; but not the time for sympathetic consideration—for every one concerned."

"Oh, sympathetic consideration! If it's only that—"

"If it's only that we don't gain much; but we do get a point of view. The important thing seems to me that, in our present curious and difficult conjuncture, all three of us—you, Clorinda, and myself—should take the right attitude from the start."

The visitor towered in his arm-chair, his hands on his hips. "If you think I'm blaming any one, I'm not—nobody but myself."

"As to that, of course, I've nothing to say. I don't know what reason you have for blaming yourself—"

"I've the reason," Grant declared, with the brutality that comes of suffering, "that I didn't take her when I could have had her."

Bainbridge felt as if he had recoiled from a blow, though outwardly he maintained his quietness of bearing.

"Ah? You could have—have had her?"

"I could—if I'd gone the right way to work."

"And—and you didn't—go the right way to work?"

"No."

The monosyllable was emphatic, so emphatic that it seemed to cut the conversation short. A long minute went by before Bainbridge could resume. "As to that you may tell me as much or as little as you choose. I know that something must have happened between you, after you left this house two years ago—or that you had

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reasons of your own for—for not wanting anything to happen at all. I merely beg you to understand that—”

But Grant had no attention to spare for what was not the aching and reproach within himself. “She’d have taken me if it hadn’t been for the way I put it.”

Being again taken by surprise, Bainbridge was obliged to reflect. “I suppose the way of putting it could have had no importance if it hadn’t betrayed a point of view. I’ve forgotten what I said the last time we talked the matter over in this room; but I fancy I must have told you that your own state of mind would be, as much as anything, the determining factor of your success—or of the lack of it.”

“My state of mind was what any other man’s would have been in the same set of circumstances.”

“I don’t think we can judge by that. Each of us has his own problem; and each man’s problem is unique. In its working out we have to stand or fall alone. As far as I remember what you said, you accepted accepted standards; and accepted standards generally have to be modified to meet an individual’s need.”

“I accepted accepted standards only to the extent of setting them aside.”

“Because of anything *I* said?”

“No; because you didn’t say anything—decisive. She sent me to you; but you wouldn’t speak.”

“Yes; I remember now. I didn’t feel at liberty to speak. I recall, too, that you showed an inclination to— to draw certain conclusions of your own—”

“In which I was right.” Having hesitated a minute, he added, brusquely, “She told me so.”

“Indeed?”

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"And I told *her* I'd—I'd marry her if she was—if she was in the gutter."

Bainbridge stirred, leaning forward eagerly in his seat. "And she—?"

"She said she wouldn't marry me—if I were on a throne."

"And were you surprised at that?"

"I was—then."

"But you wouldn't be now. Is that what you mean?"

"I'm two years older, and—hang it all!—the war has been an eye-opener in some respects."

"In showing us the difference between accepted standards and real ones. Is that it?"

"In showing us that some things are more important than others, and that we've often thrown the weight into the wrong scale. But what's the use of talking? She's going to marry you—"

"She may be going to marry me—but even so she can't do it without some inner reference to you."

"She would have done it without any inner reference to me if I hadn't turned up—what?"

"But you've turned up. That's the main thing."

"It may be the main thing to me; but it can't make any difference to you or her."

"Then you think that, with three people so intimately involved as we are, the main thing for one can pass over the other two and have no effect?"

"What effect *can* it have?"

"I'm not sure that I know, beyond the fact that we need have no personal ill will. Since it's a moral axiom that whatever blesses one blesses all, I can't be happy at the price of your unhappiness—"

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"But I can be unhappy at the price of my own damned folly, can't I?"

Bainbridge responded to this with some deliberation. "Neither happiness nor unhappiness springs from facts so much as from our way of facing them. The only reason for being wretched over one's own damned folly is in seeing nothing but folly as the issue."

"I do see nothing but folly as the issue, since I see—this."

"And of—of *this* you don't see the consequences as yet—you don't see the end."

"Ah, don't come that over me, for God's sake! I know the sort of thing you want to say—that it may be all for the best. Why, man, she—she belongs to me; we were made for each other."

Bainbridge seemed to study the tips of his fingers, which he fitted together. "Perhaps that may not be as obvious to others—to her, for example—or even to me—as it seems to you; but even if it was—"

"She'd have married me," Grant broke out, hoarsely, "if I hadn't used that confounded expression. I hurt her pride."

"You did more than that; you destroyed your own vision."

Grant stared vacantly. "My own vision?"

"Your conception of the woman whom you wanted—and whom apparently you still want—as your wife. Once you had degraded that—"

"That was done for when I found you knew something about her you wouldn't tell me. When I went back to her and told her that, she said—she said she'd tell me herself."

"And you say she did?"

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"God, yes! Finest thing I ever saw. No scene in a play ever came up to it. She stood in the middle of the room and told me"—he swallowed hard—"told me she—she'd lived with a chap as his—his mistress—for the best part of two years."

Bainbridge bowed his head. On another man's lips the words were cruder, crueller, than when merely uttered silently within his own heart. They lifted Clorinda before the world, pilloried and despised. He asked himself if he had done right in refusing Grant the information that would have spared her the task of making this confession for herself. By the time he had assured himself that in that he had had no choice, Grant went on again.

"I had my chance then," he declared, speaking with parched lips. "If I could have played up in the way—the way she wanted, she—she'd have jumped at me. I should have sworn she was as much in love with me as I was with her—up to then. If I hadn't been—"

The habit of the confessional impelled Bainbridge to assist the penitent when in difficulties for words. He spoke with head still bowed, his chin resting on his interlocked fingers. Without saying so to himself, he found the stare of the big, upright man, stuttering out his pain on the other side of the fireplace, impossible to endure. "If you hadn't been what?" he asked, when Grant found himself unable to go on.

"If I hadn't been a crazy fool. That's what I was—a fool—and crazy. I seemed to want to attack her, like a bear with a shot in its body. I said it. I said it just as an animal might make a blind rush, because it's been maddened. I didn't mean everything it—it implied."

"And yet, in a way, you did."

Grant accepted this. "I—I suppose so," he admitted,

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humbly. "I didn't see her as—as I saw her after I got away. When she told me all that, I thought of her as—"

"You needn't tell me what you thought of her as. It's enough to know that when you got away you saw you were wrong. What I don't understand is why, if you felt that, you never came back to tell her so."

"By George! she showed me to the door!" he blurted out, with a kind of naïveté. "I wasn't used to that sort of politeness."

"So that if you hurt her pride she rounded on yours."

"She rang her bell. When that tall footman came—the fellow with a voice like a bass drum—she said, 'Hindmarsh, bring Sir Malcolm Grant his hat and stick.' She couldn't go much further—what? I'd have come back if it hadn't been for that."

"And yet you've come back now?"

"Because I couldn't stand it any longer. I've tried—the Lord knows I've tried. It was easier in the first months than it was later. When war began—well, that threw us all on our backs—what? We got down to hard pan—to what you call the real standard—not the accepted one. As far as"—he gulped, till he could control his voice—"as far as I've got a real standard it's—it's somehow connected with—with her."

Bainbridge mused for a while in silence. When he spoke it was quietly and without raising his eyes. "Why do you say that to *me?*—*now?*"

The reply was prompt and naïve, like so much else about this big, elemental man. "Because you're in wrong, old boy. You won't make a go of it."

It was Bainbridge's turn to look up and stare. "Making a go of it," he said, after a brief space of thinking, "is

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secondary. If one does what's right for the minute, the making a go of it will take care of itself."

The thunder of the voice recalled to Bainbridge the simile just used of the rush of an animal in pain. "And you call this *right*?"

"It may not seem right to you—"

"You can bet your life it doesn't."

"If that's because you think I didn't play fair—"

"I don't go as far as that. I can't help saying that it seems to me, well, damned queer, if you'll excuse the expression"—Bainbridge nodded—"that after all you said to me that day, and didn't say—didn't say, mind you—I should come back here and find you—find you in possession, so to speak. It looks as if you'd taken my tip and worked it against me."

"That's what I was afraid of; and we sha'n't be able to start right unless you know the truth. If you're obliged to add the sense that you've been wronged to what you have to suffer otherwise—"

"Oh, I don't say wronged. I suppose that if I stepped out you had a right to step in, even if, for a clergyman—"

"But I didn't step in—in the way you mean." He waited a minute before saying, gently: "I didn't know that the veiled lady who came to see me, now nearly four years ago, and the lady who has promised to be my wife were one and the same person till—till this afternoon."

Grant bent forward, his hands on his knees. His attitude was that of a man trying to take in words beyond his power of comprehension. "You—you didn't know—what?"

Bainbridge repeated his statement, putting it as simply as he could.

The Canadian raised himself and fell back into the

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depths of his chair. "Good God! So you were caught in a trap!"

"No. The unexpected isn't necessarily a trap."

Grant asked his question as a man who feels that much may hang on the answer. "But now that you know it—what difference will it make?"

"None. Why should it?"

"But, man—"

"Am I doing anything you wouldn't do yourself?"

"I'm not—not a clergyman. And even I, at first—"

"Is there any reason why a clergyman should be less honorable than another man?"

"There's a reason why he should—should set a high example."

"And what would be a high example—in this case?"

"Surely it wouldn't be to marry—marry a woman—"

Bainbridge helped him out. "Marry a woman who has admitted to us both that she's—a sinner. Is that it?"

Grant nodded an assent.

"But what's a sinner?"

"A sinner is a person who has done something wrong—what? And when it's a woman—"

"You can think of only one kind of wrong. But what of you—and of me?"

"We're not women."

"But we've sinned. It's possible that we may have sinned in just the way that she has."

"But we're men."

"What difference does that make?"

"It makes all the difference. I know that some people talk of one law for both men and women; but you can't make it work."

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"But that's just the point. In my case I *mean* to make it work."

The baronet struck his knee with his closed fist, with some emphasis. "My dear sir, you won't; you can't; it's not in nature."

"But if it's in *my* nature—"

Grant shook his head violently. If there had been mirth in the inarticulate sound that broke from his lips he might be said to have laughed. "But it's not. It's not in any man's nature. If he thinks it is—"

"You mean that what can be wrong for the woman can be right—or almost right—for the man."

"That's about it."

"And yet we have a case which most of us would consider to have some authority in which it wasn't treated so. It's a case, too, which the general concensus of human opinion holds to have been dealt with supremely well."

By his looks and his silence Grant appeared to ask what case.

"There was a woman taken in adultery and brought before One whom I fancy you and I both revere. Those who brought her were men. Except for herself there were only men in the company. And yet it was to them, to this group composed entirely of men, that the Saviour said, 'He that is without sin among *you* let him first cast a stone at her.' He made no distinction between their sin and hers. They themselves saw no distinction, for one by one they went out and left her there. It seems to me," he concluded, "that we may be like them."

In Grant's tone there was a grievance—there was something shocked. "Oh, if you're going to bring *that* into affairs like yours and mine—"

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"I don't need to bring it in; I take it for granted that it is there. I also take it for granted that we get the keynote of our conduct toward sinners of every kind when the same speaker goes on to say: 'Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more.' It's the sinning no more that forms the important condition; and it's also the condition which the—the lady of whom we're speaking has fulfilled." He continued while Grant rose heavily to take his stand with his back to the dying fire: "Your own attitude toward her is something I don't clearly see."

The Canadian took his time in replying. "My attitude's all right," he declared, moodily, when he considered he had thought the matter out. "I can't talk as well as you, but I know what I feel. Toward her I'm all right."

"Then I can only be gratified by your conviction."

Grant surveyed the carpet, the hearth-rug, and his boots. "It's the position," he said at last, still looking at the floor. "As my wife—don't you see?—she could carry it off—at a pinch; as yours—I don't see how she can."

"You mean as the wife of a layman—"

"And a man who lives in another country—and belongs to another people—but especially as the wife of a layman, as you call it—"

"You forget that it wouldn't be as a clergyman that I should be marrying her—not any more than you would do the same as a banker. In both cases we should simply be men."

"In both cases a dray-horse and a racer are horses; but they're different in breed and in qualities. A woman who has a choice between a banker and a clergyman has a choice between men; but she also has a choice between

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two kinds of life—what? She might take to the one as a filly to the pasture, and find that she didn't have the lungs or the speed for the other."

Bainbridge was not offended by the nature of this comparison, but he was disturbed by a hint of truth in it. Rising abruptly, he began to pace the room with a kind of agitation to which he didn't generally yield. He had never forgotten that Clorinda herself had said: "That I should be the wife of a clergyman is inconceivable." Somehow it *was* inconceivable. It had always been inconceivable. Now that Sir Malcolm Grant was there, he, Bainbridge, understood how the man could put forth his savage claim that Clorinda and he were made for each other. They were—in a sense. They had similar traditions and a similar knowledge of the world. In both there was a minimum of soul, even if a soul was in process of emerging, while each suggested the fine animal, the thoroughbred, the creature noble of body and gentle of temper, and winsome and high-spirited and strong. Could the one go tamely off about his business? and could the other be broken to the yoke of the parish round, with its petty, if benevolent, interests, its teacup quarrels, and its old wives' tales . . . ?

He was still pondering these questions when Grant strode across from his place on the hearth-rug and laid a hand on his shoulder. He could do it, partly because he was so big, partly because, when all was said and done, he was the elder.

"Look here, Bainbridge," he began, in a kindly tone, "you're a good fellow—by God! you *are* good!—"

Bainbridge threw back his head and looked up. "I dare say it seems so to you," he said, earnestly, "but—but I know to the contrary."

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"Then all I can say is that you put up a great bluff. I admit the truth of most of the things you say. I'll go further and confess that I never heard a man reel off so much truth to the square yard—"

"You forget," Bainbridge smiled, faintly, "that the laws of conduct are my business just as the methods of finance are yours. I hope that the world needs both of us and that I can serve my turn."

"You bet you serve your turn—but I don't believe that your turn is in the direction in which you're looking for it now. I—I *don't*."

"But if I do—"

"Then you're wrong." Grant now laid a hand on each of the shoulders of the other man, holding him at arm's-length. "A woman who's had the experience *she's* had might be my wife—she could fit herself into the position—and—and so could I—now—but she couldn't be yours." He added, as with a little shove he withdrew his hands, "There you have it from me straight."

Bainbridge stepped back, looking at his rival with the clear, deep gaze of eyes with an unusual capacity for candor and intensity. "And what you have straight from me is that love can work miracles. A man's love," he went on, "can do anything for a woman—"

"So you've told me once already; but you added, 'if it's of the right sort.'"

"And mine is."

"Mine wasn't," Grant declared, firmly. "I confess to that. But it is now, by George!—and if it isn't I'll make it so."

"Then it seems to me we can only leave it to her."

"Will you leave it to her?"

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"I'll—I'll leave it to more than to her. I'll leave it—
leave it to the great principle of right, which I have to
serve before I serve any one or anything else."

"Done."

And on the word they clasped hands.

CHAPTER XV

IT was the first time Bainbridge had ever seen Clorinda's anger flame out against himself.

"I told you then, for the express reason that I wanted him to know. It wasn't the minute I should have chosen above all others; but before you left me alone with him I wished to make the situation clear."

"But my point," Bainbridge endeavored to say as he watched the storm, "was not that you should have told me then; it was that you should have told me, and told him, at a time when new circumstances might have made it well for you to wait."

For the minute she, too, watched the storm. Past the window of her little office-sitting-room the drifts whirled like a procession of wild wraiths. In the air, on the ground, the snow danced and flew and piled and deepened, eddying into the middle of the street, pelting itself into the crevices of eaves and windows and doorways, lashing the faces of the rare passers-by, blurring the arc-lights that were just beginning to come out like wan twilight stars, flying down from heaven and up again, or swirling off into infinity. Now and then a motor panted and plowed its way along; now and then a cab-horse, inured to changes of weather, dragged a ramshackled brougham through the white obscurity; now and then a business man battled his way homeward; now and then

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a girl, lithe and buoyant, made herself the spirit of the wind; but mostly the great street was empty of everything but the sweep and onrush of the tempest.

In its force and grandeur and terror and exhilaration Bainbridge found it akin to something within himself. Clorinda had renewed her promise to marry him. She had renewed it with deliberation and a kind of splendor. "You know already that I mean to do what you've asked me—and be your wife."

It was characteristic of her that she should have made this declaration standing, in the royal attitude, with the grand manner of one who confers distinction and knows that she is doing it. When Bainbridge had bowed over the hand she offered him, she allowed the other to lie lightly and caressingly on his head.

It was the touch that made him nothing but a man.

When after a minute, if time could be measured by tickings of the clock, she released herself from him, not without a struggle, the gesture with which her hand went up to the scarlet spot on her cheek might have been that of a princess outraged and amazed.

"You mustn't—" she began to stammer, tremblingly.

"I mustn't—what?" he challenged.

"You mustn't"—she began, tremblingly again—"you mustn't startle me."

He, too, was flushed. His eyes glistened as she had never seen them glisten before. "Oh, Clorinda, don't you remember telling me you were made for love?"

She was still the amazed and outraged princess. "Yes; but you weren't."

"Oh yes, I was—with one side of my nature. It's a side that now—"

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Though the back of her hand was against her cheek as if she was hiding a stain, she contrived to smile faintly. "Yes, yes; but not too—not too suddenly. I must get used to you—" His look may have touched her, for she extended her hands to him at once, with what might have been compunction. "There! You can take my hands—both of them. They're—they're yours. Only—only don't—don't startle me again."

Once more she allowed him to cover both her hands with kisses; once more she released one of them and ran it lightly across his hair. This done, she detached herself and moved away to a place of greater safety. "Sit down," she commanded, pointing to one of the worn arm-chairs. Having seated herself at the French eighteenth-century desk that combined the attributes of business and elegance, she subjoined: "Now we can talk."

Talk was not Bainbridge's primary need. For the first time he was seized with a pang that seemed to transform his being into a sheet of flame. He could not have said that it was either jealousy or rage; it was rather as if scales had suddenly fallen from his eyes so that he saw her as she was. Not in this way had she yielded herself to the man who had been her lover for two years. He had forgotten the words in which she had told him so, but he had retained their general significance. In that case there had been an electric flash of emotion, violent and irresistible, in comparison with which nothing would have mattered, not if it was to be death at the next moment. There had been no shrinking from him, no keeping him at arm's-length. She had been his, and his willingly.

Not till he saw her remove herself from him had this thought really come to him. In the duality of his own outlook he had viewed her hitherto less as a woman than

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as a soul. Even since the discovery of her actual identity, made twenty-four hours earlier, he had been able to think of her as the sinning woman of the New Testament, with her qualities of pity, glamour, and picturesqueness, while the sublime, "Neither do I condemn thee," had chanted itself like an anthem in his heart. Now that was gone. Something had dispelled the vision and stopped the song. What he saw was the woman whom he loved, noble, magnificent—and defiled. For a minute he understood the passion of the Othellos and Don José's of the world, which can kill more easily than it can do anything else.

"You love me, don't you, Clorinda?"

Though there was more anguish than assurance in the question, Clorinda smiled. "I told you on Christmas Eve that I was afraid I did—and—and I do." Before he could make a response she added, softly: "It's one of the kinds of love."

He stared blankly. "One of the kinds of love? What do you mean?"

Her agitation struggled with her efforts to be self-controlled and calm. "I mean that if there are more kinds than one, this is the kind I can feel for you."

"And you could feel another for some one else?" he asked, suspiciously. "Do you want me to understand that?"

"No; but—but it's a question you shouldn't ask me. When I tell you that I do love you—sincerely and honestly—enough to marry you—you ought to be content."

"But—but the kind you can feel for me? What kind is that?"

She looked down at the paper-weight with which her

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fingers toyed. "I suppose—I suppose the kind one can feel for a—for a clergyman."

He flushed to a deeper shade of red. "But I'm not a clergyman—in this relation. I'm only a man."

She continued to finger the paper-weight. "You're a clergyman before you're anything else to me. If you hadn't been a clergyman—"

"Well? What then?"

"Oh, then—I don't suppose I should have cared anything about you."

He fell back into the depths of his arm-chair. "Clorinda, you're amazing! How can I follow you?"

"Perhaps you can't," she returned, gently; "but I don't see why you should try when the matter only concerns me."

"Only concerns you?"

"I'm doing what you asked me to do; and I'm doing it from what seem to me the highest motives." She glanced obliquely toward him, with a certain diffidence. "I care for you, because—because you're the best man I've ever known. It's precisely because you are the best man that I do care. You've been wonderful to me—from that—that very first time we talked. You remember? But you wouldn't have been so if you hadn't been what you are professionally. One can't imagine a lawyer, or a doctor, or a—"

"Or a banker," he suggested, cruelly.

She accepted the word. "Or a banker, being able to say the things you've said to me, or knowing anything about them. I told you once that you were different from other men—that you spoke another language. You do. I've thought of you a little as one thinks—don't be shocked or offended!—I'm saying it in quite the right

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way!—but I've thought of you a little as one thinks of Christ when they brought to him the woman—"

He cried out imploringly, "Don't, Clorinda!"

"Then I won't. And yet why should I not? Nobody else would ever have met me as you did—and recognized me—and seen through me—and known about me the things you knew—and been so perfect toward me always. If I speak of it more than you like, it's because—because it—it makes my happiness. It's given me back some of the things I thought could never become mine again. And so," she went on, tremulously, "you'll always be a clergyman to me. You couldn't be anything else. And that brings me to—to the explanation it seems I have to make."

He was so busy with the question as to whether or not it was his duty to tell her that he hadn't recognized or seen through her in the way that gave her happiness that he could only murmur, half absently, "Make it."

She continued in some confusion: "It's just this—that you must give me time. You must let me get used to you in—in a new light. When"—the scarlet came back into her cheek again and she averted her face—"when a *priest* does what—what you did just now—it's so—so terrifying—"

He leaned forward till he could grasp her skirt. "But, good God, Clorinda, I'm as much a man as—as"—the name forced its way out—"as Malcolm Grant."

Her first act was to detach her skirt from his clutch, which she did with gentle, unhastening deliberation. With the expression of displeasure in her eyes she was able to look toward him, though she had been keeping her head turned away. "Why do you mention *him*—especially?"

"Because he's come back."

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"Well? What difference does that make to me?"

"I can't tell you. I only know the difference it makes to him."

"Then you've been talking me over."

"How could we help it, when—?"

"When I sent him to you in the first place. Yes, of course. I remember. I accept the responsibility. And the difference it makes to him is—what?"

"He seems to feel that he still has a claim upon you."

"Indeed? And you agree with him?"

"Not unless you do yourself."

"And what makes you think that I possibly could?"

Before the calm pride of her bearing he could only have answered in the stress of an intense feeling made up of many blends. "It seemed to me strange that you should have said that you'd marry me—"

"I see—at that particular moment and in that particular way." A second's reflection impelled her to add,

"But since I did it you might have given me the credit for having had a reason."

It was the agonizing fact that she had withheld herself from him, when she had not done so from others, that whipped him on. "Oh, I know you had a reason; but if it was to inflict on him a kind of revenge—"

"Revenge? Why should I inflict revenge on him? What has he been telling you?"

"Nothing that isn't kind toward you," he thought it fair to say; "only—only I gathered that he was still in love with you—"

He got no comfort when she interrupted him with the words, "So other men have been."

"And that," he struggled on, ignoring the stab, "he was not without hopes—"

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He could see that her displeasure was heightening into anger. "And did he send you to plead for him?"

"No," he declared, with spirit. "If I'm pleading at all it's for yourself, Clorinda—that you won't marry me—that you won't marry any one—till you can marry him as a *man*. And, furthermore, if there is any one whom you could marry as a man—marry *him*."

Impulsively she went toward him, placing her hands on his shoulders in such a way that he was held down in his chair. Nothing had ever thrilled him in his life like the struggle between indignation and tenderness in her face and eyes as she bent above him. "You must let me do what I can," she insisted. "Don't try to force me, or to turn me into something I'm not. It's possible that some day I may see you as you want me to see you; but for the present you're to me just what I've said—no less and no more. You're more to me than a man—you're a saint—or an angel—or a priest—or any other high messenger you choose to name. Merely as a man—" Withdrawing her hands with an abrupt little gesture which told him that merely as a man he would not have appealed to her, she went to the window, where, with her back to him, she stood looking out on the storm. He was wondering how he could demolish the halo with which she surrounded him, when she began again: "Since you're curious about Malcolm Grant—if curious is the word—I'll explain to you. I told you then for the express reason that I wanted him to know. It wasn't the minute I should have chosen above all others; but before you left me alone with him I wished to make the situation clear."

Half contrite, he followed her to the window. It was something to be near her, even if she refused to let him touch her and shrank from his caress. "But my point,"

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he endeavored to say, as he, too, looked out on the storm, "was not that you should have told me then, but that you should have told me, and told him, at a time when new circumstances might have made it well for you to wait."

"Wait?" she exclaimed, imperiously. "What should I have waited for? He—he insulted me. He used language toward me I never could forgive."

"Yes, in the heat of a great shock; but—"

"The shock was the test. It was the kind of test that comes in fire or shipwreck—by which a man is either made or broken. If a man proves himself a coward you can never forget it, even if he's a coward only because his ship is going down. If you had been in the same situation—as you have been, practically—you wouldn't have humiliated me by so much as a thought. To beat a woman when she's down is the most brutal of the human instincts. To take her by the hand and raise her up again, as you've done—"

His eyes were haggard as he turned them toward her.

"Yes, Clorinda; but love is something different."

"Is it? Wasn't there a woman in the Bible whose sins were forgiven because she loved much?—and wouldn't the converse of that also have been true, that she would have loved much because her sins had been forgiven?"

"Yes; but there's love and love. There's the love we feel toward God, and the love we feel toward man. They're different; we mustn't confound them. They spring from different sources; they're not of the same nature. We come there to a place where language is meager and clumsy; but the heart *knows*. I didn't forgive your sins, Clorinda. I'm only a man. It's as a man I love you; love me as a man. If you can't—"

"If I can't, it's because I can't."

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"If you can't, it's because . . . Clorinda, tell me—how near did you come to marrying Malcolm Grant?"

The promptness of her answer took him by surprise. "I came very near—so near that if his point of view had been different I should have done it."

"But if his point of view is different *now*?"

"That's exactly it. It's what I guessed the minute I saw him yesterday. It is different now. And it's because it's different now that I was anxious not to—not to leave the door open to him, as it were, a minute longer than I could help."

"Nor to leave it open to yourself. Wasn't that in it, too?—even if no more than subconsciously."

She drew herself up, though her look and her tone touched him. "That's cruel. I didn't expect it of you. If I'm shutting doors that have been open to myself, it's only because I'm groping to find the worthiest way. That you should taunt me with that—"

"But I don't taunt you with anything," he cried, passionately. "I'm only afraid that you don't recognize your own motives. If you can't love me as a man, it means that you can't love me at all. If you can't love me as—as—as"—he struggled with himself, but the words were beyond his control—"as you loved the others—"

"Stop!" She drew away from him, right to the other side of the room. "You offend me," she declared, from a distance. "You beat me down again after having raised me up. If you knew how hard the struggle is for me—"

He remained where he was, by the window. "What struggle, Clorinda?"

"Between what you call—what you call, in your language of religion, the flesh and the spirit—"

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"And I represent the spirit while Malcolm Grant is the flesh? Is that it?" He remembered the way in which he had thought of her. "I'm not a figure in stained glass, Clorinda. I'm a man, with a man's passions and hungers—"

She threw her hands apart with a fatalistic gesture. "Ah, I've seen so much of that. I thought—I thought I was getting away from it. If you've only dragged me out of the fire to pull me back into it again—"

"Well, what then?"

"Then I might as well—" But she kept that thought to herself, swerving off to another. "Aren't your old church legends full of tales of sinful women—women like Thais and Pelagia—won back from their wicked lives by holy men, whom they've followed and imitated—?"

He almost shouted. "But I'm *not* a holy man, Clorinda—no more than you're a Thais or a Pelagia. We're just a man and a woman—"

She seemed a little weary. "Any man?—and any woman?"

"Yes, any man and any woman."

There was a repetition of her fatalistic gesture. She studied him too, with a sad half-smile, her head slightly to one side. It was as if making a resolution that she said at last: "Very well, then; here I am—for you to do with as you like." With the words she advanced toward him, slowly, meekly, her hands behind her back.

When, some fifteen minutes later, Bainbridge came down the stairs, he heard voices in the dining-room. The bass was that of Hindmarsh.

"Now that's the fruit-knife, and that's the fish-knife and that's the butter-knife." There was a sound of the

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shuffling of silver, the articles being laid out again on the table. "Now, shaow me the fish-knife."

As he paused on the lowest step of the stairs Bainbridge saw Pansy, neatly dressed in black with a coquettish white apron, emerge into the circle of the dining-room light and peer over the table for the inspection. Hindmarsh looked on with an interested smile.

"Nao!" he laughed, when Pansy had made her guess. "You *are* a little silly. But pytience 'll do it. That's the butter-knife. Now let's try agyne. All you need is a little pytience. I'll learn you in taimé."

Bainbridge put his hand to his forehead and tried to think. What was it Pansy stood for? It was the next step he had to take—but what? The last half-hour had blurred it into a black spot in his memory, as fire scars a wood. He heard Hindmarsh begin again.

"Your nyme's Pansy, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir," the response came timidly.

"That's a pretty nyme; but you needn't sye sir to me. Just call me Mr. Hindmarsh. Didn't you never live out before?"

"No, sir—no, Mr. Hindmarsh—only with Miss Higgins."

"Oh, well; you'll soon pick it up. Pytience 'll do it, I always sye. It's a science, livin' out is; but if you've got a gift for it— Now let's try agyne. That's the fish-knife, and that the butter-knife . . ."

But Pansy having given him the cue, Bainbridge went forward to pick up his hat and overcoat and face the storm.

CHAPTER XVI

REMEMBERING that he had promised to dine *en famille* with Leslie and Maggie Palliser, Bainbridge, on leaving Mrs. Gildersleeve's house in Madison Avenue, decided to fight his way through the storm to Sixty-ninth Street. The lashing of the north wind was grateful to his burning cheeks; in the gale the mingling of fury with a fierce exciting joy was the counterpart to the struggle of passions within him.

Now that he was out in the boisterous twilight it surprised him to see how many were as venturesome as he. Vehicles were few, but pedestrians relatively many, most of them doubtless finding a pleasure similar to his own in wrestling with the wind that whistled through the canyon streets, and caught the breath, and pelted the face with a shrapnel of snow, and wrought the senses up to ecstasy. Newsboys called the evening papers with glee in the debased English of their cries; gnome-like men, jaded and broken, emerged from nowhere with shovels on their shoulders; here and there a policeman opposed his huge bulk to the onset of the elements; on both sides of Fifth Avenue the colors of flowers, pictures, old furniture, and books gleamed mistily through the drifts like jewels behind a veil.

Obscurely Bainbridge found himself comforted. Bodily

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exertion was a relief to mental and spiritual tornado. The madness of the gusts that tore at him, not only from every point of the compass, but down from the roofs above him, and up from the snow-piled pavement beneath his feet, counteracted in some degree the futile confusion of his impulses. He called it futile confusion because it seemed to lead to no outlet. The maelstrom could boil over into all the waters of the sea; the rapids of Niagara were allowed to become no more than a placid stream; the fires at the heart of the earth found vent in an occasional Hecla or Vesuvius; but here the welter of emotions could only go round and round, shut in on itself, with no issue and no overflow. One thought was slain by another thought; hope only formed itself to be leaped on by another hope and strangled; love merged itself into suspicion almost as soon as he knew it to be love, and suspicion into jealousy, and jealousy into frenzy, only to have frenzy reveal itself as the purest, and in some respects the most desperate, devotion.

The facts concerning Clorinda Gildersleeve were irconcilable. Had he not known them to be facts he must have rejected them as impossibilities. Noble—magnificent—defiled! These were the terms he had applied to her; but they couldn't fuse; they were too hostile to each other to be used of the same character. And yet which could he retract? Could any of them be retracted? Could he not take all the synonyms for all the three and find them equally in point? Was he to be her dupe or her slave or her saviour? Would his love be her redemption? Or should he himself become only one more on a list of lovers which the intensity of his suffering impelled him to write down as long?

The storm did not answer these questions; but it sub-

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dued, and in a measure soothed, the eagerness with which he put them to his soul.

Though by the time he reached the house in Sixty-ninth Street he was tolerably calm, Maggie was quick to notice that he was both excited and fatigued. "You shouldn't have come out on an evening like this," she commented, anxiously, as she put a comfortable chair near the library fire; "or else you should have called me up so that I could have sent Tufts for you in the big limousine." Both the children were with her, a boy of eight and a girl of five, but she dismissed them to their playroom at the top of the house, in order that Bainbridge might have the half-hour before dinner to rest himself. A maternal quality entered into her care of him. "What's the matter, Arthur?" she asked, when they were alone.

There was ardor in his reply, in spite of a weary, twisted smile. "Nothing that isn't good—very good."

"Then you don't look it. I never saw you so"—she sought for a word—"so strange."

"You'd be strange, too, if you'd been out in a storm like this." It was in his mind to make a clean breast of it, to her at least. There was, indeed, no reason why he should not have told any one. He hardly knew what withheld him, beyond the consideration that it might be for Clorinda herself to give the word. As it was he had got as far as saying, "I'm en—" when the door opened and Leslie walked in.

In the constraint which followed there was an element of naïveté. That Maggie should be childish Bainbridge took as a matter of course; but that Leslie should be equally so gave him a measure of relief. Where anger was passing into pettishness reconciliation would be easier.

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It was of a piece with this spirit that when, after dinner, Bainbridge asked for a little music, Maggie should say: "Oh, then I'll leave you together. Leslie doesn't care to have me around when he's playing. Do you, Leslie?"

"Why, yes, if you want to listen," Leslie replied, indifferently. "But the minute I begin to play you generally start in to talk."

"Oh, then I sha'n't this evening, for I shall not be here. You'll excuse me, Arthur, won't you? I'm sorry not to stay; but since Leslie doesn't want me I shall go and see the children put to bed. Be sure to let me know if you'd like Tufts to take you home. The storm seems to be blowing itself out."

Leslie was in the middle of Gluck's gavotte arranged by Brahms when he snatched his hands from the piano, to say, abruptly, "Arthur, take my advice and never marry."

Before there was time for a response he was off on the next entrancing phrase, so that his guest had the opportunity to turn the interruption over in his mind. In the large white-and-gold room only the electrics nearest the piano were turned on. Bainbridge was seated where he generally placed himself when Leslie played, in a low arm-chair from which he faced the performer, partly in profile, and could watch his hands.

"I might take another man's advice—" he began when his friend had finished his selection.

"And do it. Not if he spoke as sincerely as I'm speaking now—at least not in the case of nine men who marry out of ten. Undoubtedly there's a tenth man who—"

"Who finds in marriage what he's looking for."

"If he's not looking for very much. But you would be. You're an idealist by profession; and the man who takes

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an ideal into marriage—well, I can only say, God help him!"

"And very likely God does."

"If so God is the only one. Man doesn't—and still less woman."

Bainbridge began to perceive that his friend was endeavoring to "get something over" to him, possibly without having the exact channel through which his meaning could be conveyed. The result was on Leslie's part a certain exaggeration and brutality, and on Bainbridge's nothing but perplexity.

"Something depends on what a man marries *for*," the latter mused, after a minute's reflection.

Palliser's pretense at the downright exposure of his soul was not the less bitter for being superficially nonchalant. "I married for money." The assertion was followed by a series of airy scales up and down the keyboard.

"Oh no, you didn't, Leslie. You married as most people do—because the time for marriage had come—and there was Maggie—"

Palliser again snatched his hands from the keys to throw back his head with a "Ha!" intended for laughter.

"And there was Maggie," Bainbridge insisted, speaking slowly, "who was in love with you—and you, being a well-disposed, kindly chap, expected to fall in love with her—which in a way you've done—"

The repeated "Ha!" emphasized now by a loud wild chord, might have meant anything from tears to derision, or from denial to agreement.

"Not as every one else would do it," Bainbridge pursued, with an air of tranquillity, "but each man has his own way of falling in love—and yours has been to see in Maggie the wholesomeness of her great big heart—and do

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it justice—with an infusion of pity for her, too—and an all-round appreciation of her splendid qualities—”

On this analysis of his state of mind Palliser broke in with the opening bars of a nocturne of Chopin's. He continued it softly as he said: “Funny, Arthur, how you can hit the nail on the head about another man's affairs and be altogether off on your own. And yet I suppose it's natural enough. Doctor can often prescribe for a patient, and yet need some one else to do it for himself.” He studied the movements of his hands as he played dreamily. “See here; tell me; what should you marry for, if you ever came to do it?—which I hope to the Lord you never may.”

Had it not been for the curious undercurrent of endeavor, resembling the so-called efforts of spirits to get something “across,” which he had already detected in his host, Bainbridge would have taken this as no more than one of the intimate abstract questions permissible between old friends. As it was, his suspicion of a motive impelled him to answer warily:

“I suppose that when I marry it will be in fulfilment of a general law. Few people know *why* they marry. The time for it comes—and they do it. One man says it's for love, and another that it's because he wants a home—”

“But I'm asking what you'd say?”

Bainbridge was still on his guard, though against what he didn't know. “Haven't I told you that already?”

“You've said that it would be in fulfilment of a law. But why should you fulfil the law at one time more than another?”

“Because there comes a day when Nature—”

“Just so. That's where I wanted to bring you. Good

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old Nature baits her hook. But the bait turns out to be a bit of dry feather, while the hook goes into your gills for life. See?" He swayed gently to Chopin's somnolent phrases. "Wise old party, Nature is. No one knows better than herself that if she didn't dazzle the eyes with an artificial fly she'd never get the systematic reproduction of the species. But—and this is my point—you're too good to be used like that. You're meant for other things."

The nocturne was still singing its soothing way as Bainbridge said: "Why are you giving me this information now? Have you been—hearing anything?"

"I've been hearing enough to make one exception to what I've just said. As I remember telling you once before, there *is* a nice girl—"

Bainbridge's sudden movement was one of irritation. "Please don't go on with that."

"Well, *she's* all right. She wouldn't be a—a shock to your parishioners. But"—he bent low over the keyboard, wringing out the theme with passionate intensity—"but marry any one else—"

Though he left the sentence unfinished, a sharp, nervous, aching chord or two enabled him to convey the impression of something broken off, with pain and disillusion as the sequel. Bainbridge's chin rested on the back of his clasped hands, while his thoughts were thrown back upon himself.

"What do you mean by—by a shock to my parishioners?"

"Oh, well, it's always a shock to people when their clergyman gets married."

The echo here of Clorinda's feeling of the afternoon was startling. "Why?" he asked, blankly. "Is there a dif-

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ference between the marriage of a clergyman and that of any other man?"

The nocturne took a skipping, graceful turn. "O Lord, yes. At heart we're all believers in the celibacy of the clergy." He added, after a few more cheerful bars: "The marriage of a clergyman isn't different from that of any other man—to *him*. It only is to us—his people. It—it brings him down. He's never the same to us afterward."

Bainbridge's exclamation came out as a protest, almost as a groan. "Oh, rot, Leslie!"

In proportion as the one man showed his distress the other grew master of himself. "No, it isn't rot, old boy. It's in human nature. If people think anything of a clergyman at all they want to keep him on a level higher than their own. He stands for the things they're trying to work up to."

"And is there anything higher than a consecrated marriage?"

"Y-yes." Mystery, yearning, aspiration, seemed to flow from the keys beneath Palliser's fingers. "I don't know exactly what it is; but, like everybody else, I feel it's there. Marriage, I take it, at its best, is primarily a concession to the animal within us, for the sake of an animal offspring. But there must be something better than that." He asked, as the wistful, climbing melody rose from one straining pitch to another: "Isn't there something in the Bible about neither marrying nor giving in marriage—because we've reached a higher state?"

"There is—but we haven't yet reached it."

"No; but we're on the way. That's just the point. We're like people toiling up a mountain, with a guide going on ahead. We want him to be higher up than our-

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selves, so that he can show us where we're going. The clergyman who's only jogging along with the rest of us—well, he's hardly a clergyman at all." The mounting of the repeated theme seemed about to touch its climax when it broke off suddenly in a kind of wail. "If he's made of the same clay as ourselves, with the same needs and passions, we don't want to know it. At any rate, we don't want the fact obtruded on us when we're trying to associate him with better things. When he insists on our seeing him just as we see any other man he—he falls; and," he quoted, "when he falls, he falls like Lucifer, never to rise again."

Bainbridge waited till the composition had died away in a succession of soft, patient sighs, breathing resignation, if not peace. Because he knew he had grown pale he rose and moved away out of the patch of light. It was from a distance that he accosted his friend, who was now swinging idly on the stool. "Leslie! Why are you saying all this to me now? What have you got up your sleeve?"

Leslie rose and moved round toward the tail of the piano, where he leaned with his back against it. Before speaking he took out a cigarette, which he fingered but didn't light. Again Bainbridge received the impression that he wished to convey something without saying it. His manner betrayed its excitement chiefly by its effort to seem cool.

"I've nothing but this up my sleeve, old boy," he declared at last: "that if you marry any one but—but the nice girl I've referred to, your work—your happy, useful work I may call it—at St. Mary Magdalen's will have been done."

Bainbridge gathered all his inner resources together.

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"Are you—are you thinking of—of any one in particular—when you say that?"

Deliberately Palliser took out his match-box and struck a light. The cigarette was between his lips as he said, indistinctly, and yet in a way to be quite articulate: "I'm thinking of what I've said. You could make a marriage that wouldn't be a shock to us. Any other marriage would—would turn you into nothing but a man."

This second echo of Clorinda's thought was like the whip-lash of exasperation. "But, good God, Leslie!" he cried out, "I *am* nothing but a man!"

Palliser smiled. "Oh no, Arthur. You're a good deal more than a man, as men are known to us. To a lot of us you've been—the guide going on before the climber. You've meant so much to us in that capacity that we want to keep you there. It makes us the more sure that we ourselves shall go upward."

"And admitting for the moment that that's so, do you mean to tell me that just because I marry—?"

"Yes; to some extent, just because you marry. Rightly or wrongly, we've lifted you toward the sphere where they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but—I think I've got the words of the Bible—but are as the angels of God. You're one of the men—there have been a good many of them in the world at one time or another—who come to us as interpreters of a life purer than our own. The minute you marry you come down into our life; and when you do you can't help us any more. It seems to me, Arthur, that you've reached a point where you must choose between being the guide or the climber—"

"But, my dear fellow, hasn't this question been fought out long ago? and hasn't the whole portion of Christen-

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dom to which we belong admitted that a married clergy—?”

“Is better than a corrupt one; yes; but it hasn't admitted more than that. With a man like you there's no such question; and so—”

“And so, to gratify a fancy I must become what Kipling calls a plaster saint—”

“Oh, it's deeper than a fancy. You wouldn't find the largest churches of East and West making it an essential if it didn't respond to a demand within the human heart. When you've said all you can for marriage, it remains physical, material, of the earth earthy, and only good enough for the common man. I've often thought that a large part of the flabbiness of Protestantism, and of its economic wastefulness, comes from the fact that we've so few guides going on above us, and a lot of blind leaders of the blind struggling along in the mass. Are you going to stay up or are you coming down? That's the choice before you.”

Bainbridge took a step forward, out of the obscurity in which for some minutes he had kept himself. In his haggard eyes there was an expression that might have passed as one of curiosity. “And are you saying all this, Leslie, from preference for an unmarried clergy—?”

“That's one reason—quite sincerely,” Palliser hastened to interpose.

“Or have you any other object?”

Leslie gazed at the lighted end of his cigarette. “What other object could I have?”

“God alone knows.”

Palliser answered with unusual distinctness of utterance, spacing his words apart. “Well—Arthur—God alone—does know; and I propose that—God alone—shall

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know." He added, in a more casual tone, "But that doesn't prevent the things I've said being, in a general way, both true and sincere."

"Excuse me, Leslie," Maggie's voice came from the threshold, "but the night is really so bad that I think I should either keep Arthur here or have Tufts to take him home."

It seemed to Bainbridge that he had to bring his mind from myriads of miles away to discuss these kindly proposals.

CHAPTER XVII

FOR a man as kind as the assistant rector of St. Mary Magdalen's the warmth, not to say the effusiveness, of a welcome like Miss Higgins's could not be otherwise than painful. As it was the day after the storm, the state of the streets compelled her, so she said, to remain at home.

"I thought it a bore at first—one gets so used to one's little round in society, doesn't one?—but since it has brought me a call from my clergyman I take it as quite a happy dispensation. Do sit down." She pointed to the red sofa he had last occupied side by side with Maggie Palliser. "I'll take this chair. It will be convenient when Josephetta brings the tea."

"No tea for me," he begged, hurriedly.

"No? Then we'll just talk. I so often long to talk with my clergyman. It seems to me that people, and some of the best people, are ever so much more interested in religion than they used to be. There was a time when it was considered quite *mal à propos* to mention it; but now Of course some are against it as well as some being for; but it's always for and against in this world, don't you think? and I say it's better for religion to be spoken of *anyhow* rather than just to be ignored. I feel that about so many things, don't you? and I can hardly tell you what a treat it is to me to be able to talk with

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some one quite sympathetic, who understands
The storm has really been a blessing in disguise, for I've
so wanted to tell you how grateful I am for what's been
done for little Pansy Wilde. I should have written to
you about it, only that I said to myself, 'Well, there!
Mr. Bainbridge must get *so* many letters, and this will
be only one more for him to answer.' . . . I'm always
thinking of others like that. I suppose it's in me. Things
have to be in you, don't you think? You can't force
them. You're either like that or you're not like that, I
always think. And when I remember little Pansy
My present maid is quite an elderly colored woman.
Josephetta is her name. I couldn't run the same risk
twice, now could I? Living alone as I do, and a woman
having nothing but her reputation. . . . If I'd known
more of the world I shouldn't have allowed Pansy so much
liberty; but I hadn't a thought—not the shadow of a
thought—not the ghost of the shadow of a thought
But now that it's all ended so happily and Pansy in such
good hands at the House of Comfort "

Miss Higgins confessed that she had not accomplished
much with her life—society took so much time!—but she
really could take some credit to herself for what had been
done for Pansy Wilde, now couldn't she? It had been a
positive inspiration, her speaking of the matter to Mr.
Bainbridge that day at the Cloudsleys' reception. Didn't
he think Mrs. Cloudsley a dear? and wasn't Edith too
quaint for anything?—so like a darling child painted by
Holbein or Lucas Cranach. That plain style really seemed
to be coming in again. So many of the girls in New York
nowadays were plain, and the better the family the plainer
they were, as a general thing. Plainness was really quite
a distinction, something which every one couldn't afford.

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if he knew what she meant. She had had no idea that things with Pansy were *quite* as bad as they afterward proved to be, which made her the more pleased with her happy thought. The mother was such a good woman, too, just a simple American woman of the good old country stock, incapable of understanding life in New York. But she was softened and comforted now by the kindness shown her from St. Mary Magdalen's, and who knew but that Pansy's downfall might do her good? In any case, she, Miss Higgins, could congratulate herself on the part she had played, for even if it was but a minor one it brought her into the company of her distinguished visitor. She rattled on so fast and with so little intermission that Bainbridge had nothing to do but study her and watch for his opportunity. What struck him chiefly was the bland innocuousness of this Delphic Pythia whose utterances did so much to make or mar the peace of households and to direct fates. Week by week the leaves on which her oracles were written went broadcast throughout the land, to be seized, devoured, pondered on, discussed. There were circles in which her dicta got more attention than any Presidential message, and much more than an interchange of diplomatic notes. As a mystery and an influence she roused consciences and molded lives. She excited the young, and frightened the wicked, and shocked the respectable, and amused the safe, and interested every one. In the same way that she had scared Claribel Jarrott away from her Mr. Searle, and wakened Leslie and Maggie Palliser to a sense of their marital realities, she had probably sown her bread upon the waters through all the federated States; and yet, here she sat, no avenging goddess, no pantheress in her den, but a mincing, talkative, harmless lady, dressed in a pale-blue tea-gown, with

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a suggestion of the aqueous and unimportant in her personality, and eyes like a pair of empty china plates. There was nothing cruel or cat-like about her, and not much that was sinister. That little was in her manner, which was too ingratiating for sincerity, and in the changeless smile of her long, thin, somewhat prognathic mouth.

"Do you recognize this?"

He never quite knew how he came to whip from his pocket a copy of the journal to which he believed his hostess to be a contributor, and to lay a certain paragraph under her eyes. His mind resumed its working with his consciousness of her frozen smile. If he noticed anything further it was a slight tendency on her side to overact her part. As an illustration of that, her hands refused to touch the object he held out toward her, while she betrayed her intimacy with its contents by not glancing at the lines to which his finger pointed. She contented herself with smiling fixedly, saying, with a kind of wooden, rehearsed surprise:

"Why, no!"

He continued to hold the paper toward her, his finger tapping the line he wished her to read. "Have you looked at it?"

Her pale eyes grew frightened, though the smile maintained its rigidity. "Why should I look at it? What has it to do with me?"

"That's what I thought you might tell me."

"Well, I can't. I haven't the faintest idea what you mean. Really, Mr. Bainbridge, considering that you're my clergyman—"

"Please look at it and tell me whether or not you've ever seen it before."

She leaned forward with an expression in which distress

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mingled with the amused, gingerly concession she might have made to a child. "I never have," she declared, still without taking time to glance at a line.

"Look again."

She looked again in the same manner. Her response was a silent shake of the head.

"Take it," he commanded, gently. "You can see it better if you have it in your own hands."

She took it delicately, as though it was something not quite clean, holding it between thumb and second finger, by the upper left-hand corner and the lower right, somewhat transversely. Her smile was that of a person lending herself to a puzzle or a parlor trick. "Now what do I do?" she asked, with an air of patient bewilderment.

Again he pointed to the piece. "Will you be good enough to read that?"

For a half-second she seemed to read. "How shocking!" she commented then. "Such nice people, too. One never knows, does one?" She lifted her big, pale, frightened eyes with a look of bravado. "But what can I do about it?"

"If you'll tell me what you've done about it already I'll explain to you what you can do next."

"I? Done about it?" She turned the paper over helplessly. "What *can* I have done about it?"

"Written it."

"Written it? Me? Why, really, Mr. Bainbridge!" Hurriedly she appeared to scan the lines, searching for traces of her own craftsmanship. "Why—why, I never—"

"Never saw that before?"

She tried to be indignant, but succeeded only in being faint. "N-no."

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"Think, Miss Higgins," he said, sternly.

"But I tell you I never have. I don't see what you come here to accuse me of—my clergyman, too!"

"I don't come here to accuse you of anything. I'm only asking your help in putting right a wrong."

"If you mean a wrong that I've committed—"

"I don't say you've committed it—maliciously."

"If you say I've committed it at *all*—"

"I want you to say that."

The smile had gradually gone out, while the thin prognathic mouth did its best to express horror. "Say I've betrayed my friends in society?—and held them up before the public—?"

"It isn't the holding them up before the public that does the harm; it's the injuring them in the eyes of each other."

In face and tone the surprise was now unfeigned. "Injuring them in the eyes of each other? Whatever do you mean, Mr. Bainbridge?"

"What the public does or doesn't think of people like Leslie and Maggie Palliser is of no importance. If it remembers to-day it will forget to-morrow. That can pass. But did it never occur to you that in putting suspicion into the mind of a wife toward her husband, and of a husband toward his wife—?"

"Oh, if people don't know each other well enough when they've been married as many years as they have—"

"Do people ever know one another well enough—in the sense you mean? Aren't we always strangers to one another, even the husbands and wives who live in the closest communion? Hasn't each of us a right to a kind of sacredness in his private life—?"

"Oh, but when it's only a little bit of fun!"

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"A little bit of fun?" He gazed at her steadily. "Then you did do it."

She bit her lip, a faint flush stealing over her prominent cheek-bones. "I never said that."

"Then what do you mean by a little bit of fun? Fun for whom?"

"Why—why, fun for—for any one."

"And you'd see people you know—people who, I think, have always been kind to you—suffer, suffer acutely, in order that some unknown person might have fun? Oh, Miss Higgins, that's not like the fine woman I take you to be."

The pale eyes grew paler behind a mist of tears. "I didn't know," she began to stammer, "that—that any one was suffering—"

"Did you care?"

She strove to right herself again. "How could I care when—when I didn't know anything about it?"

Gently he withdrew the publication from her lap and slipped it back into his pocket. "Then if you persist in saying that, there will be no choice for me but—but to act."

Where there had been only fear in her face there was now terror. "Act, Mr. Bainbridge? What do you mean by that?"

"What can I mean but to have—to have every door in New York shut against you?" A slight pause emphasized the softly spoken words, "I can."

"Oh, but you wouldn't!" She clasped her hands on her breast. The words came out like a plea.

"I shouldn't want to; but it might become my duty."

The catch in her breath amounted to a sob. "Your duty to hunt down a poor, friendless woman, who—?"

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"You'd only be a poor, friendless woman when you'd put yourself outside the range of friendship. I don't consider you've done so as yet. As I've already said, people have been kind to you. The last time I was in this room it was crowded with the most important people in New York social life who had no other motive in coming than to let you see they cared for you. I've little hesitation in saying that if you were in trouble or need I could go out among the families of St. Mary Magdalen's and in two hours raise a sum that would take care of you for life."

The tears were flowing freely as she said, "That wouldn't be on my account; it would be on yours."

"Let us say that it would be on account of both of us. The fact remains that you've been holding up to ridicule or castigation those who've been well disposed toward you, who've welcomed you to their houses when you had nothing to offer them in exchange—"

Genuine anger made the pallid personality flame into life. She grasped the arms of her chair, her long-waisted figure stiffening and straining forward, the voice growing shrill and imperative. "What do you know? Who's been telling you about me?"

"No one's been telling me about you, Miss Higgins. What I know I know merely through the performance of my duty. What's more than that, I come here not as an accuser, but as your friend. If you'd trust me—"

"Trust you, when you threaten to have me turned out of every house in New York? Why, man, it's—it's"—the declaration came out because she couldn't keep it back—"it's all I've got to live on."

He ignored this confession to say, quietly: "I didn't say turned out, I said kept out. There's a difference. And that I said only in case you didn't trust me."

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"But what's the good of trusting you—now?"

"This good, that I could make things easy for you by showing you how to do right."

She began to mop her eyes with a kind of fierceness. "Do right by going to people like Leslie and Maggie Palliser, and telling them I didn't know anything about them—"

He considered this admission. "If you didn't know anything about them—"

She seemed to gather all her forces of avowal and indignation together in one exasperated cry. "*I didn't!* I didn't *know* anything about them—and I didn't care. I just guessed. It's practically all I ever do. I'm paid for guessing; and nine times out of ten I guess right. Now you know it all."

He fell back into the depths of the red sofa, too amazed to speak. "Do you really want me to believe—?" he began when he had grasped the meaning of her words.

"I want you to believe that I have to earn a living, and that I've got nothing to earn it on but my footing in society. If you take that away from me you reduce me to beggary. So there!"

As she threw back her head, with a daring which the mask of smiling ineffectuality concealed, she was more distinctly a living human being than he had hitherto thought possible. Curiously enough, too, he began to feel toward her a creeping sympathy in which there was an element almost of respect. "Then I understand you to say that in what you write you don't pretend to know the facts—"

"Hardly ever," she threw in, with an audacity not without a dash of tears. "The ordinary American reader wants something spicy. He doesn't care whether it's true or not."

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"Nor you either?"

"When I hit the probable I'm near enough. It's just talk. No one expects it to be more than that."

"But there's helpful talk, and harmful talk; and in the present case—"

"I've said nothing but what every one who knew the Pallisers could see for themselves. With his looks and her temper—"

"Still it was only guesswork."

"Guesswork of a kind. You put two and two together—"

"And it was still guesswork when you introduced a third person?—a certain dark-eyed lady, I think you called her—"

"No, that was a little more." Now that she was confessing, she displayed an almost hysterical desire to go on. He divined, indeed, on her part that relief in getting rid of concealments and in coming out into the light common to all human beings accustomed to go skulking along in the dark. "That was a little more," she repeated, eagerly. "I'd seen enough to know what to think—especially as things go here in New York. I wouldn't give her name—well, for one reason because she's always been so perfectly lovely to me, and I'm never one to go prying into any one's private life. It's not in me; and when a thing isn't in you, you don't do it," she declared, flatly.

It seemed to him that he saw his first real opportunity. "Exactly; that's just the point. You see it partly for yourself. That's what, in your writing, you should try to do all round. As it is, you shield, to some extent at least, a woman who's on the stage and accustomed to publicity, and yet you have no hesitation in delivering up—"

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The plate-like eyes grew rounder than ever; the slightly underhung lower lip dropped in a vacant wonder; the shrill voice fell. "But she's not on the stage. I can't think who you're talking about. Leslie Palliser has never gone in for that kind of thing. If he had I should know. I don't go prying into other people's private lives; it isn't in me; but that couldn't have escaped me, with all I've seen of New York. There's no reason why I shouldn't tell *you*. You know so much of what goes on among the very best. It was Clorinda Gildersleeve."

In Bainbridge's mind there were three distinct processes, of each of which he was curiously able to take account. The first was a kind of nightmare impulse to spring on this creature and strangle her. The second was of the nature of the lifting of a veil that had blinded his eyes and clogged his mental movements and forced him to a helpless feeling of his way through mysteries. By the third, which kept him seated with apparent tranquillity in his corner of the sofa, an arm stretched along the back, he repeated to himself the words: "I'm a priest. This woman has a soul. I'm here not to upbraid her or to punish her, but to help her. She's my charge. As long as I'm in this room her necessities must come before everything. What concerns me must wait."

He hardly noticed that Miss Higgins's eyes rested on his face with a kind of bewilderment at what she saw there. He was only vaguely conscious when, with her excited zeal to pour everything out on him and spare him no detail, she hurried on. "I didn't know anything about that, either—not for sure. It was just a coincidence. I saw him twice."

It was partly his confessor's instinct and partly something irrepressible within himself that prompted the

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question, asking hoarsely and with difficulty: "Twice—where?"

Miss Higgins was only too anxious to tell, not merely for the sake of purging her soul of its secrets, but of reveling at the same time in the wickedness of those who passed as virtuous. "Coming away from her house—very late at night. It was the most extraordinary thing that I should have been going by on both occasions. I was coming home from dining with the Wrenns. They live in Thirty-seventh Street, just round the corner from Clorinda. They often ask me, quite *dans l'intimité*. I walk home, because it's a mere step from here—and that's how it happened." She paused, not only for breath, but to dash away a tear or two, and also to enjoy the effect she was producing. "The first time—well, I hardly thought anything of it. I knew they were all great friends together, and that Maggie and Clorinda were a kind of cousins, and so . . . It just occurred to me that if anybody *wanted* to look for a scandal—but it's not in me to do that—and I simply let it pass—keeping it only in the back of my mind in case . . . But the second time—that was a month or two later—and it must have been quite near midnight—well, I must say I thought it queer. . . . Still I wouldn't *believe* anything, not for Clorinda's sake. She's always been too heavenly to me—and it's nothing to me what people are in their private life. I'm very liberal like that; it's in me to be so. And if I hadn't proved it for myself, as you might say—"

He followed her sufficiently to be able to repeat, "Proved it?"

"Yes, proved it—in a way." Miss Higgins's enjoyment of her tale became more manifest as it went on. "Any one who knows me knows I never pry into what doesn't

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concern me; and if it hadn't been that I wanted to be in a position to defend Clorinda, if ever her name came up, I shouldn't have done it."

"What did you do?"

She grew confidential. "Well, there's no reason why I shouldn't tell *you*, Mr. Bainbridge. You're a clergyman, and you have your own way of finding out things, just as much as I have. If you didn't have you wouldn't have found out about me, though how you did . . . But I've nothing to conceal, as I think you must see. . . . Why, I went straight to the nearest druggist's and rang up Maggie's house in Sixty-ninth Street, before he could get there. I said I was a stenographer at the rooms of the National Economic Society, working late—and could they tell me if Mr. Palliser was in, or if not where he could be found, as it was about a series of lectures. It was a man who answered, a footman I suppose, and he said if I'd hold the line he'd consult Mrs. Palliser. When he came back he said that Mr. Palliser was spending the evening at the New Netherlands Club—and so I put two and two together. I shouldn't have done it," she continued, rapidly, terrified by her visitor's expression, "if it hadn't been for Clorinda's sake. I was so anxious to defend her." It was still Bainbridge's expression that sent her rushing on. "Oh, it's awful, New York is! We're all corrupt. I don't know what's to become of us. It's like the last days of the Roman Empire. Such luxury and extravagance and license! I don't pretend to be a bit better than others; pretense isn't in me; but then I'm no worse. How a clergyman like you can go on working among us and trying to do us good—"

"Stop," Bainbridge said, quietly.

Miss Higgins came to an abrupt halt. As her facile

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tears were already flowing, she began to cry. "Now that you've got me in your power," she whimpered, "I suppose you're going to ruin me."

To this it was a long minute before he made a response. He needed the time to disperse the thoughts of which Leslie was the center that crowded in the forefront of his mind. He also needed the time to remind himself again that, viper as this woman made herself, it was for him to disclose in her the spiritual and the lovely and help her to be true to it. Another man's task, he admitted, might be different; but that was his.

"Now you see why Leslie is so eager that you shouldn't marry." "Now you see what's been weighing on poor Maggie all these years, and what she couldn't understand." "Now you see why Leslie and Clorinda have been supposed not to like each other, liking each other probably too well." "Now you see—"

By a heroic effort he dismissed these thoughts, or thrust them backward, in order to say to Miss Higgins, with something like calmness of utterance: "No, I'm not going to ruin you—not if you do what I tell you."

She whimpered again. "You'll ruin me if you take away my means of livelihood. I sha'n't have five hundred dollars a year. I've simply got to go everywhere and see everybody—"

"I'm not going to take away your means of livelihood. I shall only ask you to do what will leave you with a clearer conscience. You're not a mean and spiteful woman naturally, though you've done some mean and spiteful things."

"I didn't do them meanly or spitefully, either—"

"No; you did them only foolishly, and with a wish to make money out of other people's failings." He tapped

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the pocket containing the Delphic oracles. "I've been looking over these pages. Every thing in them isn't unkindly, by any means. It's gossipy and trivial, to be sure, and not worth while; but there's no great harm in it. Why shouldn't you write like that?"

"They wouldn't want me to."

"Try it. People have been good to you; be good to them—and see. There's a line in the New Testament which I dare say you remember. The authorized version gives it as: 'Ever follow that which is good,' but a modern translation makes it: 'Always follow the kindest course.' I'm going to ask you to take that as a sort of motto—"

"It isn't in me not to be kind," she sobbed.

"No, of course, it isn't, not naturally."

"But if I'm not spicy—"

"Just try it and see. If evil seems to succeed, good will succeed better. All we need is the courage to act up to it. I shall be surprised not to learn that if you've been paid for being nasty you'll be better paid for being nice. And there's one thing more," he hurried on, not allowing her to speak. "You've done a great deal of harm to Leslie and Maggie Palliser. I want you to help in putting that right."

The prognathic jaw dropped again. "If it's going to them on my bended knees—and eating humble pie—and telling them that I was just putting two and two together—that I couldn't do. It's not in me. Oh, don't make me do it—"

"Wait! Let me finish. I don't want you to see them. I don't want them even to know your name. We'll—we'll not do anything sensational or theatrical. They think well of you as it is. Let them continue to do so. But"—he took a moment to reflect—"but go over there—"

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he pointed to a desk—"and take down what I dictate. Write," he went on, when she had seated herself, pen in hand, "write on paper with no address, and nothing but the date.

"I am the author of the paragraphs that have given you offense. I wish to say that I have talked to Mr. Bainbridge, and now beg to tell you that I wrote thoughtlessly and foolishly, with no real knowledge of your lives or your affairs. What I have said was pure invention, or speculation at the most. It had no more malicious intention than to amuse some careless reader, and I can only ask you to pardon it. I shall not use your names again.

"Don't put any signature," he added. "As to that I shall make the necessary explanation, which will not be much." He was on his feet when she brought the completed lines. Having glanced at them, he folded the sheet and put it into his pocket-book. The act kept his eye from hers as he continued: "And in the matter of your—your silly and gratuitous thought of—of Mrs. Gildersleeve—you'll, of course, never mention it again. You'll—you'll do what you can to—dismiss it from a mind which should never—have harbored it." Having said this, he found it the easier to look up for his concluding words. "I'm doing my best for you; and now it remains for you to do what you can for yourself. We'll talk about everything again, later. In the mean while you've the words I've given you: *Always follow the kindest course.* If you do take them as a motto you'll find that they'll be a guide, not only in your writing, but in everything else."

When he held out his hand it was with a sickening sensation that he found her seizing and kissing it; and yet

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he deemed it his duty to conceal his repugnance and to let her repeat the act.

As he passed St. Mary Magdalen's after leaving Miss Higgins's apartment he went in. Dusk was beginning to come down, and the church was dim and silent. It was an eloquent silence, the peace of a consecrated isle, in the midst of a sea of passion and unrest; it was a rich dimness, with the gleam of brasses and the colors of flowers and stained glass mingling in a sumptuous, lusterless twilight.

Two women, widely separated, were the church's only occupants. One was kneeling, with bent head; the other was seated, reading from the Bible or a book of prayers. Bainbridge took his place noiselessly behind them and fell upon his knees.

But he couldn't pray. His thoughts were too confused for praying. They were confused and vengeful and helpless. Like Elijah under the juniper-tree, he could only mutter, brokenly: "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life." The words passed through his mind repeatedly. It was the only form of self-expression he could find.

Clorinda and Leslie! Clorinda and Maggie! Maggie and Leslie! Clorinda betraying the woman who had been good to her! Leslie betraying the wife who adored him! All three of them his friends and intimates! The corruption in the air he had breathed! The poison which for all the future would be food and drink to him! How could he pray? What should he pray for? It was all over and done with and accursed. Since there was nothing to do but to accept the facts, what place was left for prayer?

There was nothing to do but to accept the facts! But how must he accept them? There must be different

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methods of acceptance, and which should be his? Even here there was a right and a wrong; even here he had to be a priest. There might be a thing permissible to other men which would not be permissible to him; there might be a necessity for him which would not be a necessity for them.

It was as far as, for the moment, he could go. All was so obscure that when he covered his eyes with his hands he made nothing any darker. In the darkness he could only endure. Thought became formless, chaotic. Even suffering grew to be an unilluminated, brutal thing, like the suffering of some huge beast neither seeing nor searching a why or a wherefore. Into it he was so deeply plunged that it was like the primal order of things, nerveless, inorganic, unconscious. He might have been immersed in it; he might have been drowned in it. During the space of a long half-hour he might have been reduced to the amoebic, to the protoplasmic.

When intelligence began to stir it was in disconnected phrases out of the ageless record of human experience which was to him as his every-day speech. They came without prelude and passed without sequence, out of the darkness and into the darkness again.

"Yea, even mine own familiar friend whom I trusted hath laid great wait for me."

"Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers."

"And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet—and decked with gold and precious stones—and upon her forehead was a name written—MYSTERY."

"And one shall ask him, What are these wounds in thine hands? and he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends."

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He bowed his head. Thought again became silent and inactive. It was as if the words had welled up from the gulf of Time when he found himself saying, a little later:

"Out of the deep have I called unto thee, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice."

He repeated the words in the sonorous tongue in which they came laden with the need and petition of sixty generations:

"De profundis clamavi ad te, Domine; Domine exaudi vocem meam."

"De profundis! De profundis!" he kept saying to himself, till the very syllables lulled him again into an emotionless quiet that might have passed for peace.

That evening he laid what was in some respects the most oppressive portion of his burden before Dr. Galloway. He could do it the more easily because they had met in the rector's study to discuss the special services and meetings they should hold in the approaching Lent.

"And how much practical good do you suppose we're going to do with it all?"

It was the bitter, blurring tone that caused the rector to look up in surprise as he sat sidewise to his desk, taking notes of the various suggestions. He answered, slowly:

"I dare say we sha'n't accomplish any that we can see, or not much." He added, with a certain sadness in the tone: "I've been through too many Lents to expect it."

He was a huge, bulky, Buddha-like man, whose size rendered him incapable of much physical activity. Nevertheless, the heavy, clean-shaven face was alight with intelligence, and the eyes were keen. A leonine mane of

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white hair, brushed back from temples and brow, gave him a touch of the apostolic."

Bainbridge's tone was still bitter. "Then why do we go on doing it?"

The reply was not so much ponderous as delivered with a certain well-weighed solemnity. "To the best of my belief, we go on doing it in the hope of the future, but with the conservative, self-perpetuating methods of the past."

"And do you think that's enough?"

A brief hesitation preceded the reply. "No. The poverty of the return in proportion to the immensity of the effort shows that it's not enough." There was a second brief hesitation. "Bainbridge, I've never said to any one before what I'm now going to confess to you. I've come to the conclusion, not only by thinking, but by living and seeing, that Christianity needs to be presented under some new and simpler and more vital form."

"What?" Bainbridge demanded, eagerly. "Which?"

"I'm an old man. I've worked for fifty years along the lines on which I'm working now. I cling to my Book of Common Prayer, and to the rites and ceremonies of the Church. I cling to them passionately. I don't suppose I shall ever give them up."

Bainbridge drew to the edge of his arm-chair and leaned forward, his elbows on his knees. His face was to his body as the flame is to the torch. "But—but would you think it *right* to give them up?"

The response was as measured as before. "I think it right for every living organism to *grow*. And growth means change. And change means readjustment. And readjustment means new methods to meet new needs. And new needs mean new perceptions. And new percep-

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tions mean a fuller grasp of truth. Where you have perpetual youth you have perpetual adaptation."

"But isn't the Church the fruitage and heritage of the past?"

"No." The answer was both gentle and firm. "No. That's the doctrine that's producing petrification in us." The rumble of his deep voice seemed to shake the room. "Christianity is *petrifying*. Our conservatism is reducing it to stone. Truth has no past. Truth knows no such limit as time. It is new every morning. It is reborn every day. Our love of tradition—of history—of scholasticism—of habit—of mere habit above everything—is substituting a dead past for a living Christ; and so to a world hungering and thirsting after righteousness we're offering the petrified thing—the stone."

"Ah, but is the world hungering and thirsting after righteousness?" Bainbridge felt the root of his questioning to be there. "Are the people of New York doing it, for example? or even the members of St. Mary Magdalen's? Not to go *outside* St. Mary Magdalen's—aren't sin and wickedness and—and—impurity—germinating there with the fertility of plants in a hot-bed—among the very men and women we mix with every day—and think highly of—and—and"—the word came out with a mingling of shamefacedness and passion—"and *love*? Aren't most of us rotten? Isn't it putrefaction rather than petrification that makes our difficulty?"

The keen old eyes rested on him long and sympathetically. "I see. That's what's troubling you. I knew something was the matter with you—and I presume that that's—part of it."

"Yes," Bainbridge admitted, hanging his head, "that's—part of it. It's—it's a good deal of it."

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"It has troubled me too—in the past. It doesn't so much now, because—well, because it depends somewhat on one's point of view—on one's way of looking at one's fellow-men."

Bainbridge's bloodshot eyes asked the necessary question without words.

"You can see human beings from the angle of their vice and depravity, in which case you despair of them as—to use your own word—as rotten. Or you can see them from the angle of their struggle with evil, in which case you applaud them as soldiers, or, like Some One Else, you have compassion on the multitude because they are as sheep having no shepherd. I once—" a new pause gave emphasis to his words before he uttered them—"I once looked upon all New York as materialistic, soulless, debauched, besotted, and stupefied with success. To-day—I have compassion on the multitude—and on the individuals who make it up. I know them. I know their greeds and their lusts and their impieties and their crazes; but I know, too, the fight they're making."

"Some, perhaps," Bainbridge objected, promptly; "a few; not all."

"Yes, all—in the sense that to get rid of our evils—social, political, personal—is a large part of the spirit of the day. No one escapes it wholly, not the most indifferent or selfish. What is it, for example, that Mary's been telling me about Clorinda Gildersleeve? Taken a poor little girl, hasn't she? to give her a chance. Clorinda Gildersleeve is the type of the great American pagan. She's never belonged to a church, nor her father nor her mother before her. And yet, you see! She reflects the nobility of the age, of her surroundings."

"In one respect," Bainbridge agreed, with an inward

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bitterness of which he tried to give no outward indication.

"One respect—if it's no more than that—is a great deal. It's the beginning of the process that sooner or later will include all respects. Don't be in too big a hurry. Don't try to go faster than God. I used to. I don't now. Now I'm satisfied to watch the fight—and foresee the victory. When any one comes to me now—or I go to him—and I learn things that a few years ago might have amazed or staggered me—"

"Then—what?" Bainbridge asked the brief question as a man who hangs on the reply.

"Then—I take such things as the dust of the battle. Where there's fighting, blood will flow—raw blood, red blood—and that's always an ugly, animal thing—but the big struggle's behind it. That's what's to rejoice hearts like yours and mine—the big struggle that's going on, not only in our churches, but outside them—and of which such an action as Clorinda Gildersleeve's is an example. That's what I see now—right here in New York—right here in St. Mary Magdalen's—where, of course, the fight is as fierce as anywhere."

"Then if—if you discovered that people you knew—and cared for—were guilty of—of great sin—?"

"The sin wouldn't be any the greater because it was committed by people I knew and cared for. I'd treat people I knew and cared for as I should treat people I didn't know and didn't care for at all. I'd see them as soldiers who've been struck down in the battle, but are likely to scramble up again and contribute their share to the big victory that's to be won."

"Ah, but, when it's something that—that touches oneself—very closely?"

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"There's one thing, Bainbridge, that touches you and me more closely than anything else. It's that no man—and no woman—however near—however mistaken—however debased—shall ask bread of us and we offer him or her a stone. When there's fighting there must be food; and it's our part to bring it. I've reached the time in life, and I may say of experience, when I don't look much, and don't think much, beyond that. Nor do I mind telling you that it's the hardest thing I've got to do. I'm an organizer by nature; I'm a business man. I never had spiritual gifts. I used to think it a fine thing that I'd built up an efficient parish with everything running as by clockwork; and perhaps it is. We've got one of the biggest incomes, and one of the best choirs, and one of the most influential congregations in the country; and yet there are senses in which I'd rather have done what Clorinda Gildersleeve has done for that one poor little waif—the practical, useful, positively definite thing, I mean—than be responsible for it all."

"But can you compare undertakings so dissimilar?"

"No, perhaps not. All I mean is that I've given so much attention to the machinery that I haven't thought enough of the product that's turned out. Probably I'm too old now ever to do very differently. But you're young, my boy. You'll live to see great changes in the religious, in the Christian, world. Possibly you'll have something to do with it—I rather think you will—with the shaking off the dead, paralyzing hand of the past—and the opening of the living stores—and the unsealing of the living waters—so that all—or the majority, at least—will be eager to come—and eat and drink."

Bainbridge sat silent, his elbows on his knees, his forehead bowed upon his hands, his eyes staring vacantly at

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the floor. They stared vacantly because his vision was an inner one. It was like the lifting of another veil, beyond the veil that had been raised for him that afternoon and hard on which the dark horizon had shut down. The horizon now began to melt away, revealing not so much an outlook as a mist—but a mist glorified and sun-shot, through which a man might feel his way.

When he had again raised his head, New York—the world—the universe—had suddenly become more spacious.

CHAPTER XVIII

IT was one of the rare nights in his life during which Bainbridge did not so much as go to bed. The hours passed without his noticing, as he tramped from the study into the dining-room and back, returning ever and again on his footsteps. It was between two and three in the morning when he heard a stirring and a whispering in the hall, after which Wedlock, a grotesque little figure in carpet slippers and one of Bainbridge's old dressing-gowns, which was too long for him, appeared on the threshold.

His tone was distressed and pitying. "Can't you sleep, sir? No more can I; no more can Mrs. Wedlock, in a manner of speaking. She's sent me to ask if you couldn't heat a little something, sir. There's plenty o' cold meat in the 'ouse, for you didn't 'ardly touch nothink for your dinner."

Bainbridge stopped in his walk just long enough to say: "No, Wedlock, thank you. I'm quite all right. Go back to bed, and Mrs. Wedlock too."

But Wedlock insisted. Directed by his wife in loud whispers from the hall, he brought a bottle of milk and a plate of crackers, and laid them on the dining-room table. "Try to heat a little, sir. Wakefulness ain't often nothink but having nothink in the stomach."

Bainbridge thanked him, nibbled a cracker, drank a glass of milk, and sent the old couple back to bed. Then

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he resumed his pacing, his head bent, his hands in the pockets of his house-jacket.

The subjects of his meditation were mixed, but not confused. They blended with one another, they modified one another, and yet remained distinct.

Weaving itself in with everything else was the knowledge that Leslie was the man. He had no necessity to return to the thought, since it was always there, the one constant factor in his silent debate. In vain he put it to himself, "What difference does it make whether it was he or not, so long as you knew it was some one?" It did make a difference, yet what he couldn't say. Though every nerve in his system revolted against the fact, it kept beyond his analysis. All he could say was that it brought the sin nearer; it forced it under his eyes; it made him, in a measure, a partaker of its . . .

He fought with himself over the right word. The eternal battle between the spirit and the flesh took place all over again in his soul. What was lawful and what was sin? What was permissible to human nature and what was denied? What was purity and what was mere conventionality? What was the power that could sanctify in one set of conditions that which it condemned in another, and what was the compelling motive for either course? What was passion? What was love? How far could the one excuse the other, and perhaps give it consecration? Were the so-called sins of the flesh the most polluting of sins, or were the sins of the spirit the greater? The world would overlook lying and dishonesty and treachery and ingratitude and the evil tongue to throw its emphasis here; but was he, the professed servant of God, the slave of Christ, the *doulos Christou*, as St. Paul would have called him, to see only in this half-light and with this

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semi-paralyzed eye? Was his outlook not to be wide and tolerant and unjudging?

It was morning before he came to definite conclusions. In reaching Good he reached God; and in reaching God he should be walking on his native ground, where he knew he could find the way. When his imagination flew on to situations he knew he should have to face, and he began to combine the possible circumstances in which he might have to face them, he was met by a command to which he had never paid any attention before, "Neither do ye premeditate." He paused in his walk, recognizing the harm he had done to himself all his life by his tendency to foresee conditions and prepare for them in ways which hadn't come to pass. He repeated the familiar words which he had never till this minute considered as applicable to himself: "When they shall lead you and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate; but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour that speak ye." It was like a new discovery to him that by the simple, if difficult, process of keeping in touch with Good it would be given him "in that hour" what he should speak and do. Comforted and fortified, he resumed his walk, while more and more life resolved itself, not into belief and hope and uncertainty and fear and tradition and the petitionings to which he had hitherto given the name of prayer, but into conduct. If by anything he could do others were to benefit and the petrifying become active, it must be through the demonstration of power. When he asked himself how, the answer came that "it would be given him."

Though it had been a night of suffering, it was suffering which led at least to some result. It was an obscure result, in that it prescribed nothing. There was no direct

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course for him to take, no precise thing for him to do, no line to mark out beforehand. His task was to wait and see—and act as light should be given him. "In thy light shall we see light. That was the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world," was the kind of answer with which his doubts and questionings were met. "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth," came to him at last as the key to his mental attitude toward Leslie and Clorinda. They were not his servants. To their own master they stood or they fell, without his responsibility. To reduce himself to inaction toward them, to positive inaction of thought, was at once a relief and a trial. Having accomplished it with more or less success, he felt very small and useless, very tired and worn.

He went to the window and threw it open, drawing long breaths of the sharp winter morning air. It was not yet dawn, and the stars were still visible, but darkness had passed into a blue-gray shimmer against which the nearer buildings were dense black silhouettes, while the cubes and towers farther off were aerial and tremulous. With a murmur like a long-drawn sigh the city was awaking. From somewhere near by there came a sound of early church bells. More distinctly the clanging of electric cars cut harshly on the stillness. In the neighboring streets wheels creaked over the frozen snow and occasional footsteps crunched. Now and then a voice had a solitary weird effect in this stirring that was almost voiceless. And in and through and over and under all other sounds were a tremor and a whir which he could only compare to the humming of millions upon trillions and banks and masses of bees.

If during the morning he had a surprise it was that the

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hours produced so little. In the course of his duties he saw a good many people, but there was nothing to distinguish these interviews from others of the kind. Nothing new was revealed; nothing was "given him." Without "premeditating" he had not been able to keep himself from expecting. He had expected the striking at each turn, the memorable and dramatic; and all was as before. The curtain was still down, but no flash came out of the cloud.

He drew the conclusion that this guiding light was reserving itself for the meetings that would take place between himself and the three or four other main actors in the piece of which involuntarily he felt himself the center. There would be much that was terrible to say and do; and he should receive his true prompting then. In the mean time he kept himself as best he could from anticipation, only putting his expectancy a little further off.

But he called on the light to come to his aid when, on approaching Mrs. Gildersleeve's house in the early part of the afternoon, he beheld Mary Galloway coming down the steps. Then, if ever, he needed inspiration. He needed it the more because of feeling sure of what had happened. If he had not guessed it from some inward spirit of divination, he must have read it from the manner in which the trim, dainty little figure moved. Though there were but three steps to descend, she paused on each, pressing her left hand, which held her muff, to her side, not so much like a person in pain as one in agitation.

As she turned and walked with bent head in his direction he was not free from the hope that she would pass without seeing him; but at the instant when about to do so she looked up. There was then a fragment of a second

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during which each stood still, gazing at the other. That is, it seemed like gazing, though the time was insufficient for more than a brief resting of the eyes. On her side it was occupied with the effort to get herself under control; on his with the dismay of seeing that she was obliged to do so. Even if he had never unwillingly drawn certain inferences for himself, the gossip of their common friends would now have induced a condition of self-consciousness.

As it was he became obliged to note the successive phases of emotion through which she passed so quickly that only a trained mind could have observed them. Surprise, alarm, mortification, bravado which developed into courage, followed on one another so closely as to make a blend. Though only the last remained, he had seen them one by one. To a man who knew her less well the smile she was able to force, and the frankness with which she held out her hand, might easily have been deceptive; but for him they were nullified by the pinched, drawn look he had lately remarked in her face, as well as by the poignant inquiry he now read in her eyes.

The inquiry remained inquiry, full of questioning, full of doubt, as she said, with her hand firmly clasping his: "Clorinda has been telling me the most wonderful thing. I do hope you may be very, very happy."

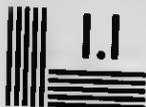
He had presence of mind enough to notice a choice of words which seemed to have been made for the purpose of being non-committal. He responded with the greater fervor: "I *know* we shall be; but thank you all the same." Making an effort to carry off the situation easily, he said further: "I should have told your father and mother at once, only that I didn't know Clorinda wanted it to come out so soon."

Behind her laugh, which endeavored to be light, he



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guessed at some measure of troubled intention. "Perhaps she didn't; but I surprised the secret. Sir Malcolm Grant let out so much that poor Clorinda was obliged to tell me the rest."

"Oh, is *he* there?"

He was vexed with himself for the irritation with which the question slipped out, and the more so when her sudden gravity seemed to acknowledge that he had an excuse. "He was; he isn't now. He lunched there; but he went away shortly after I arrived."

He was aware of partially letting down his bars from the tone in which he exclaimed: "But I thought he had gone to Kentucky."

"He left; but he was recalled. The Canadian Government has appointed him to a permanent position in New York. As they seem to need him here at once, they've sent another man to buy the horses."

Having given this information and repeated her congratulations with a greater freedom of aplomb, she bade him good-by. He realized after she had gone that what he had hoped for had not come. No special light had been vouchsafed to him. In the presence of this girl, who was suffering, he had been stupid and null.

The door was opened to him by Pansy Wilde, delicately, and almost adorably, pretty in the black dress and jaunty white apron which seemed to be her uniform. "Mr. Hindmarsh is out, sir," she smiled, timidly, in reply to Bainbridge's question, as he took off his overcoat. "He asked Mrs. Gildersleeve if I might answer the door for him, and she said I could."

"And you're getting along all right?"

There was a bright look in the face, though she hung her head. "Oh yes, sir!"

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"Better than at the Home?"

The tone was even more eager. "Oh yes, sir?"

"And the other maids are nice to you?"

The voice fell to uncertainty. "Yes, sir."

"And Hindmarsh, too?"

"Oh, *he's* all pie! He's lovely."

"And you've seen your mother?"

"Yes, sir; she come last night." She glanced up to say in a virtuous tone, "I—I asked her pardon."

"That's right, Pansy. You must try to be a good daughter to her now. Be gentle and kind to every one, and don't answer back, whatever the other maids may say to you—"

Cheek and eye brightened. "Mr. Hindmarsh said that if they was saucy to me I was to tell him. He said he'd settle their hash for them."

"I wouldn't do that, either, Pansy, if I were you. If you have anything to bear, bear it—and keep quiet. That's what helps us most in the long run."

Renouncing the joy of battle with some regret, Pansy said, "Yes, sir," docilely, and he continued on his way up-stairs.

He saw at once that Clorinda was not only nervous and excitable, but more demonstrative than on any previous occasion. Those tendernesses which he had had to beg from her she offered of her own accord, coming forward to meet him on the threshold and locking her hands about his neck. "I'm so glad you've come," she whispered. "I've wanted you so."

Never had he seen her so charming, so welcoming. Never had she been more eager to please him, to have him command. Never had her touch been lighter, her movements more graceful; never had she come so near

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to him on the simple ground of woman coming near to man. If she had had it in her mind to bewitch him with the fascinations that would most readily get possession of his senses she would have borne herself in just this way. She was simple and noble and caressing and feminine, now in turns, and now all at once.

He was both enchanted and appalled. How should he tell her what he knew? How should he share or mitigate or forestall what must of necessity be her moment of humiliation? Inwardly he begged, he prayed, for the promised light. While he watched her and smiled and responded to her moods he was saying to himself that the veil was still down, thicker than ever, a darkness where he hoped for a pillar of fire, and he knew neither what to say nor what to do.

But he waited. While she talked, somewhat inconsequentially, on subjects of no importance, he made the necessary responses, but he did no more. The workings of his mind were not only complicated; they were self-contradictory. With one set of his faculties he enjoyed, as only a lover can enjoy, the spell she cast over him; with another he found himself, in spite of his warnings of the previous night, again accusing her of treachery to Maggie Palliser; with still another he was trying to anticipate her shame when he should have to tell her that her treachery was known. Between the humanly tender in him and the sacerdotally severe the struggle was so equal that they negatived each other, rendering him powerless. "Who is sufficient for these things?" he asked himself, becoming only the more certain that unless the longed-for guidance were given him he should be lost.

Clorinda was restless, moving unquietly about the room, changing the position of an ornament, a vase of flowers,

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or a bit of furniture, not because it was out of place, but because she couldn't keep still. He, too, was restless. When she rose, he rose; when she reseated herself he paced about; when she sprang up he was as likely as not to sit down. They were both standing, however, when he threw into the conversation, abruptly, "I met Mary Galloway as I came in."

"Oh, poor Mary!" she continued, as she straightened a beflowered Chelsea shepherd and shepherdess on the cabinet beside her. "I told her. I thought it best."

"Best to tell her, or best to tell every one?"

"Both. I'd a lot of reasons for thinking she oughtn't to be taken by surprise." She stood back to consider the effect of the figurines. "Seeing her as often as I do, I can't help knowing— You see, if I hadn't intervned, poor Mary—" She allowed him to finish both of these sentences for himself as she hurried on. "And she's such a dear. No one knows how good she is better than I do. In spite of all I've done to—to upset the sweet thing's plans, she's as nice to me as ever. Why is it that the people who are so true and loyal and strong always have to be the ones to suffer most?" She went forward to move the shepherdess by the fraction of an inch. "And then I think we may as well tell every one. I *want* to tell every one. I shall write some notes to-night and post them. Then we shall have burnt our bridges, sha'n't we?"

Notwithstanding the wild mixture of his emotions, he was hurt by the figure of speech. "Is burning our bridges the right term?"

"Isn't it?" She threw him a quick look. "You're doing a daring thing—and so am I."

He was aware of the opening for gallantry he was overlooking as he said, "What daring thing are *you* doing?"

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"I'm marrying the assistant rector of St. Mary Magdalen's. Isn't that enough? If anybody had asked me a year ago to name the most impossible thing that could happen to me, I should have said *that*—if I'd thought of it—but then I never should have thought of it."

"And do you regret it?"

Once more she came and interlocked her fingers about his neck. "No; I'm glad. He's doing much more for me."

He watched the flame moving under water in her profound dark eyes. "What's he doing for you?"

"He's saving me."

"Saving you from"—he had intended to say, "from what," but he made it quickly, "from whom?"

She released him brusquely, with the fatalistic flinging out of her arms which was one of her characteristic gestures. "From myself first of all."

"And then?"

He thought he detected a weary or exasperated note in her voice as she moved away toward the other side of the room. "Oh, I don't know. It's a great deal to save me from myself." She laughed uneasily. "You mustn't ask me too many questions."

"Malcolm Grant's been here, hasn't he?" He introduced the name chiefly because she hadn't done so.

"Yes." The calculated indifference with which she brought out the word seemed to him to betray her. "He was ordered back. He came to tell me."

"What made him think you would care to know?"

"The fact that I do, I suppose. Please don't break that chair." She returned to him to lift his hands from the back of a small gilded chair on which he was leaning with nervous heaviness. As she did so, she smiled and touched him on the cheek. "You're not jealous, are you?"

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"That wouldn't be the word. I'm—"

But she hastened to interrupt. "He stayed to lunch."

"So Miss Galloway told me; but I can't help wondering why *you* didn't."

"I should if you'd given me time. I can't say everything all at once."

"Why should you have asked him? You've never asked me."

"I didn't ask him. He came just about that time—so what could I do?"

He allowed the explanation to pass. Standing with his hands behind his back, he asked, gravely: "Has the fact that he's here—permanently—anything to do with your eagerness to—to burn your bridges?"

She took this with a smile, over which, however, there was a shadow. "If it has, wouldn't that be my secret? It seems to me that all you've a right to know is—that I burn them."

He allowed this, too, to pass, not because he was satisfied, but because he recognized some justice in her contention, without agreeing with it all. Besides, he had more important matter to lay before her, and it seemed to him that the moment had come. That much he could feel, though he could feel no more. He had distinctly the sensation of a man walking in pitch darkness when he said, quietly, as if telling her a thing indifferent: "I've been talking to the person who wrote the articles about Leslie and Maggie."

As far as he could observe, the words produced for a second or two no effect. She merely stood and looked at him. If there was any change in her it was that she seemed suddenly to have grown dull of intelligence.

"Talking to him?"

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He did not correct her mistake. He had seen from the first that Pansy Wilde's unwitting betrayal of Miss Higgins had captured her notice. At present he merely nodded—and watched.

There was something worth watching. It was the transition from vacancy to fear in Clorinda's face, and from fear to a kind of dumb awaiting of her sentence. He could read what was passing in her mind as plainly as if she had spoken out. If he had talked to the writer of the lines that had annoyed them, then he knew who the "certain dark-eyed woman" was. The glamour, as far as it had existed, was off the sin. The sin itself had come near home, and grown not merely traitorous, but unspeakably vulgar and gross. The thin covering of mystery, not much of a covering, but a covering all the same, had been snatched from her. She was exposed and helpless.

By imperceptible movements she crept backward from him. Neither noticed the process till she was farther away. Her eyes were fixed on his; his eyes were fixed on hers. Otherwise there was nothing but this slow shrinking. It seemed an eternity before she spoke.

"Well?"

In its very timidity the monosyllable was imperious. Something he must say, and something to the point. It was not the first time in his life that he had been unequal to a great occasion; but it was the first time he had been unequal to an occasion as great as this. He had nothing to say at all. The only words that came to him seemed to be addressed to himself, and they were but an echo of what he had heard on the previous night. "I have compassion on the multitude. I have compassion; I have compassion." He knew he had compassion, so that the reminder failed of its effect.

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During another space that was like an eternity, but which was not more than a few seconds long, he cried inwardly for the light to make itself manifest. He must do or say something impressive. Directly or indirectly the sin must be brought home.

But the veil was still drawn, impenetrable, dark. No message came out of it, no illuminating flash. He felt as though somebody else was replying when, in answer to her laconic demand, he said: "Well, the articles won't appear any more. That's settled. Leslie and Maggie can be at peace."

Her lip quivered; her expression became child-like and frightened. It was with a child-like, frightened fluting that she began: "But—but how did they know?"

He accepted her pronoun. "They didn't know; they guessed. They—they admitted that to me. They knew Maggie had a temper and that Leslie was good-looking, and so they put two and two together and invented the situation. That there was some truth in it was no more than a happy shot."

Her eyes grew wider and, if possible, more child-like. His pity for her was such that he could have cried out from the force of it. But he was listening for direction, watching for the flash out of darkness. There was a sense in which this leading had the first place in his mind. It was as if from a distance that he heard her say: "But the—other person—the woman—?"

As there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded, he felt impelled to respond: "Oh, that was guesswork, too. She—they—told me so." There was a sofa near her, and she dropped back into it, sitting upright in a corner and staring at him with a kind of wonder-fire in her eyes. Again he felt himself urged on

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to add: "Leslie told me it was an actress; but the person who wrote the articles hadn't heard so much as that. They said it was pure invention—speculation at the most—and based on almost nothing." As she was putting her handkerchief to her lips in a way he had never seen her do before, he thought it well to give her further assurance. "The important thing is that they expressed regret that their careless words should have given so much trouble, while I know that it's not to happen again."

She bowed her head. Some seconds went by before he perceived that she was crying. She was crying bitterly, almost hysterically, and with a hint of laughter in her tears. It was the first time he had ever seen her give way to such emotion, and in an instant he was kneeling at her feet. When he tried to draw her to him, uttering soothing words, she, like Miss Higgins, yesterday, seized both his hands and kissed them.

But he himself was wondering why his confidence had not been sustained. Nothing had been given him. Nothing had been said. Nothing would ever be said now. The opportunity had gone by. Of his complicated yearnings only the compassion had been gratified; and the veil was as closely drawn as ever.

CHAPTER XIX

ON making his way between Mrs. Gildersleeve's house and that of the Pallisers, Bainbridge could only reason that the guidance on which he had counted was being reserved for his interview with Leslie and Maggie. He had arranged for it beforehand, telephoning that he had something important to say. Leslie having answered the call, Bainbridge knew by his voice that he was in some trepidation. Much as he would have liked to spare his old friend, he felt it beyond his power to do so, repeating the words of one who, three thousand years before, had tried to modify the Lord's decree, and found himself obliged to utter it even against his will: "The word that God putteth into my mouth that shall I speak." He was nothing but a mouthpiece. His difficulty lay in the fact that in Clorinda's case the mouthpiece had been charged with no message. If the same thing were to happen again. . . .

But the same thing couldn't happen again. In Clorinda's case he, Bainbridge, had not been sufficiently detached, impartial. He loved her so much that to the subtler, severer inspiration his ears had been dull of hearing. He loved Leslie and Maggie, too—but otherwise. It was not in such a way as to put him out of the question as the Lord's instrument. That he should not have faced the matter with Clorinda was a failure of which he was

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ashamed; but since they were to have their life together he might find subsequent opportunities to make amends to her.

And they were to have their life together. With her arms about him, and her cheek against his, she had whispered: "When shall we be married? Can't it be soon?"

He had replied that, Lent being so near, they would probably be obliged to defer this happiness till after Easter. She had argued that they needed no preparation; they had only to walk into the nearest church, St. Mary Magdalen's for preference, and have the ceremony blessed. There they had left the question, undecided; but the fact that it had been raised, and raised in so definite a manner, filled Bainbridge with a joy which was only the more exciting, certainly the more dramatic, for the element in it he could only describe as acrid.

In Sixty-ninth Street he found Maggie waiting for him in the library with a kind of resigned impatience. "Well, Arthur, what is it now?" were almost her first words of greeting.

"It's good news, Maggie; at least, I hope you'll find it so; but I'll tell you when Leslie comes. In the mean while I want to say a word to *you*."

"Well, say it." Having seated herself, with hands folded and feet crossed, she looked up at him.

There were points of view from which she was not the Maggie Palliser of three months before. Mental suffering had subdued her color and deepened the lines of her face; but through being less blowsy she was less pronounced, and through being less pronounced she was gentler and not so masterful.

Bainbridge did not sit down. He stood over her in an attitude of authority. "You're going to get a new chance

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now, Maggie, to see Leslie in another light, and I do hope you'll make good use of it. I've told you all along you were not just to him—"

"Has he been just to me?"

"Perhaps not; but try what being just to *him* will do in one way of making him so. A man is most likely to put his wife's claims first when she does the same with his."

"Wait till you're married yourself—and you'll see."

"I hope to; but for the minute we're not so much occupied with me as with you. I want you to be generous to Leslie—"

"Generous! Why, my dear man, there isn't a woman in New York who's been more—"

"Yes, yes; I know. You've supplied him with cash, and so long as he was willing to lick your hand, you were ready to do it. But that's not enough. You must give him not only all you have, but all you are. You must do it once for all; you must keep nothing back. You and everything you possess are to be his. There must be no more doling out. He must be master. For the very reason that you're a big, strong, wealthy, dominating woman you must make yourself humble and small and obedient—"

She laughed in his face. "I've heard of a camel going through the eye of a needle—"

"Which was **said** to be an easier task than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, and I'm afraid it applies to a rich woman, too. You know, Maggie, the kingdom of heaven is not in some other world; it's in this. If you're going to enter it you've got to enter it now. For husbands and wives a large part of the kingdom of heaven is in what they can find in each other."

Her eyes were brimming as she said: "If Leslie had only been willing there's nothing I wouldn't have—"

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"You see, Maggie, you've been in a position to dictate all the terms; and you've dictated them. You've never taken into consideration the fact that Leslie is a scholar and an artist, that he's sensitively independent, and that the one thing under which he's restive is rule. Your instinct is to rule, and you've ruled him. That is, you've ruled him in his outward conduct, while his spirit has been miles away from you. I've heard you say that something had come between you and you didn't know what it was—"

"I do now. It was other women."

"Wait till you hear what I've got to tell you. In the mean time let me go on. You could give orders to Leslie, and he was obliged to obey you, because he had no money of his own. You used the advantage your money gave you to keep him on a string. But you could only keep his body on a string; the real Leslie, as you felt accurately enough, escaped you. It's the real Leslie you need for your happiness, and so long as you keep him tied you'll never have him. Oh, Maggie, let him go free—"

"But I tell you he *is* free."

"In this house he's just as free as I am."

"Well? Aren't you our dearest friend—?"

"Exactly; and Leslie is in precisely the same place. The other night, for instance, when you offered to send me home in one of the motors because of the storm, I wasn't to tell Leslie if I wanted it; I was to tell you. Leslie was here in the room with me, and you were upstairs; but I was to send a servant, or do something like that— No, no; let me go on. That's a small thing; but it's significant. It's an illustration of the way Leslie has lived with you for nearly ten years. He's been a superior lackey—"

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She flashed out, "A superior lackey who hasn't hesitated to make me a laughing-stock in half the papers in New York—"

"Not half the newspapers in New York, but one paper only; and that a paper which has acknowledged to me that the whole story was a myth."

She jumped to her feet. "Whole story was a myth? Why, Arthur, what do you mean?"

They stood confronting each other. "I've been talking to the writer of the paragraphs."

Maggie drew a long, deep breath. Her query was the same as Clorinda's. "Well?"

He took out his pocket-book, and from its contents selected a sheet which he unfolded and lay before her. "Read that."

She read it slowly. Having finished it, she dropped back into her chair to read it the second time. "Well, Arthur, you do beat everything," was her only comment as, without lifting her eyes, she began on a third perusal. It was only on completing that that she looked up to say, "What on earth do you make of it?"

He drew up a small chair, on which he sat sidewise, his arm on the back. "I make this. The paper in which the paragraph to which you objected appeared is more than anything else a fun-maker. It's a peculiar kind of fun, but then it's a kind we Americans like. In it we're all handled without gloves just to see how we'll look. It's not meant to be taken seriously, and nine readers out of ten don't take it so. It's our form of caricature—of the sort of thing done in France or England by Spy or Sem or Max Beerbohm. I can't say that I'm enthusiastic over the *genre*, but neither can I find in it anything worse than what I say—not in intention. Where it can play the

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mischief is where it accidentally stumbles on a bit of too poignant truth."

"Accidentally? I like that."

"It was accidentally in your case. The writer told me so."

"Who was it?"

He considered. "It was some one who has no more personal ill will toward you than Spy toward the English statesmen he's drawn so amusingly."

"Was it any one I know?"

"That I'm not going to tell you. I'll say only this, that it's some one who has to earn a living, and this apparently is the obvious way. I don't defend it, but then I don't condemn it. It's a big world, and if we're going to make the best of it we must let the principle of live and let live be something of a guide. It's enough to say that you were taken, not maliciously, but simply as a person conspicuous in New York society, and made to serve your turn. Other people had served theirs, and yours had come round. The main point is that if you hadn't given a handle by—now don't be offended, Maggie!—I'm going to speak straight out!—if you hadn't given a handle by letting your temper and your wilfulness become almost a byword in the town—"

"The main point is that if Leslie hadn't taken up with some other woman so notoriously that everybody knew it—"

"No; that isn't a point at all, for the simple reason that as far as the writer was concerned it was pure invention." He continued the use of Clorinda's pronoun.

"They told me so."

She leaned toward him, her eyes almost starting from her head. "Arthur, for goodness' sake, what are you talking about?"

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"I'm simply telling you what the writer told me—that the dark-eyed woman was merely dragged in to make drama. You can see for yourself that a story in which there was no third person, in which you and Leslie had it all to yourselves, would have lacked spice; and so Clorinda Gildersleeve was introduced to make—"

Maggie shouted. "What?"

"The writer had passed Clorinda's house and seen Leslie coming out—twice, if I remember rightly—and thereby hung the tale."

"Oh, my God!" She threw herself back in her chair while a big explosive laugh shook her person, and rang through the room. "Clorinda and Leslie! Oh, Lord, how long! No! No! That's *too* funny!"

The effect was what he had hoped to produce. "And it's all there is to it—as far as the paragraphs are concerned. I've the writer's own word for it, and I know it's true. They were going by in Madison Avenue, and Leslie was coming down the steps. Then, some two months later, the same thing happened, and—"

"Does Clorinda know?" Maggie could hardly control her mirth sufficiently to get the question out.

"No. I saw her to-day, but I didn't tell her. Possibly it may be better not. If the things are not to appear any longer—"

She exploded again. "Pouff! We must tell Leslie—we simply must. Clorinda gets on his nerves—"

"Then mightn't it be wise for that reason not to say anything about it? If you and I know, may it not be just as well to let sleeping dogs lie?"

Maggie fairly shook. "Yes, but the joke of it?"

"He might not enjoy it as much as we."

"Do you mean that we're to keep it to ourselves?"

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She struck with both her fists on the arms of her chair.
"Man, it's too good."

"Still—" He hesitated and began to think. He had the better opportunity for the reason that Maggie was rocking in a new outburst of hilarity.

"Leslie and Clorinda! No, it's too funny! When I've all I can do to make him stay in the room if she comes near! He's never cared for her. She isn't his style."

"You're his style," Bainbridge said, without emphasis.

Maggie paused in her laughter to give him a look.

"Oh, me! I'm the poor old thing he was willing to make use of once upon a time—"

"He told me—or as good as told me—only a few days ago that he was in love with you."

She quieted down. "Who? Leslie?"

"If you'd only given him his head, Maggie, and let him do things in his own way, and *have* things his own way, and be master in his own house . . ."

They discussed this all over again, but on Bainbridge's part only as a by-product of his intelligence. What he was most concerned with was the question as to whether or not the leading he expected was to be granted him. As far as he could see as yet he was being left to his own devices, which, if it continued, meant that he would fail with Leslie as he had failed with Clorinda. It was to gain time in feeling the way in which to deal with this decorative sinner that he kept going over so much of the old ground again.

He was pleased, however, to see that, as far as Maggie was concerned, he was gaining by his arguments. The idea that Leslie was in love with her, and had revealed the fact to some one else, had not been without its effect. If not won by it, she was softened. That which was most

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truly Maggie Palliser was only too ready to capitulate on any terms that would bring her husband back to her. Bainbridge repeated his tale, therefore, not once nor twice, explaining how an anonymous writer had, more or less innocently, made Leslie and herself a subject of romance. The shots were of a kind that would have fallen harmlessly away from them if there hadn't been weak joints in their harness. It was for them both, and for Maggie in particular, to see that the armor was mended for the future and made impervious to such easy attack.

"Oh, well, if it was only Clorinda Gildersleeve," Maggie exclaimed, joyfully, "I can forgive him. Of course Clorinda is fine-looking and clever and she has a certain charm—any one can see that!—but Leslie wouldn't look at her the second time if she wasn't a kind of cousin of mine. We've simply *had* to be nice to her. Not that one wouldn't be. I'm devoted to her, for all that she's so moony and half-baked. But—well, I shall never get over that. Who the dickens can the fool be that cooked up such a yarn? Some woman, I bet you! Was it Bessie Wrenn? It *was*. I've always said she had something to do with reporters. Her own name is never out of the social columns. And she's hated Clorinda—why I don't know; but Clorinda does get herself hated; her head's so much in the air. Then, too, there was something left out of her when all the other good things were put in; but as for Leslie and her—well, that takes the cake!"

"Perhaps I ought to tell you," Bainbridge said, quietly, before she could go off in another burst of merriment, "that Clorinda and I are engaged to be married."

She took this with some surprise, though without being startled. "Oh! So it's you, after all!"

He smiled, perhaps uneasily.

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"What do you mean by after all?"

She seemed not to have heard the question. "What about the other man—the Canadian?"

"Well, what about him?"

The answer came slowly, and somewhat doubtfully. "Oh, I don't know—nothing, I suppose."

"Then why did you ask?"

"Oh, for no reason. On general principles. With Clorinda—"

"Yes, Maggie? With Clorinda—what?"

"Nothing, nothing. Only one never knows which way the cat's going to jump."

"Did you expect it to jump that way—the way of Malcolm Grant?"

"Good Lord! man, how can I tell? It hasn't jumped that way, so let's be thankful." She sprang from her seat. "I'm going to kiss you, Arthur. No; sit still," she commanded, as he struggled from his chair. "There!" A smack resounded on each of his cheeks before she allowed him to rise. "That's to wish you luck and to thank you for all the good you've done me. I'm going to try to follow your advice. Not that it isn't all imagination, what you think about my attitude toward Leslie. Stuff and nonsense it really is. I've never tried to rule anybody in my life—"

"You've just done it."

"But if it's going to make Leslie any happier I'll go to him for every penny I spend, and make him believe that it's his own hard earnings. And as for you, Arthur dear, if Clorinda does marry you, she'll make you a wonderful wife—in her way."

The smile with which she now regarded him was so maternal and sympathetic and mournful that he found it

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impossible to hide the trouble it inspired. "Maggie, what makes you so doubtful?"

"I'm not doubtful. I'm only—wondering."

"Wondering what?"

"Wondering, I suppose, what Clorinda will do next."

"Is she so capricious?"

"No. I shouldn't say she was capricious."

"Irresponsible, then, or inconsequential?"

"No; neither of them."

"Then what?"

She threw up her hands. "Good Lord! man, I don't know. But she's not like other people. She's a relation of mine, and I've known her all her life—on and off. Of late years I've known her very well indeed—and yet I don't know her at all. That's flat. She's a mystery. The nearest thing I can say is that when you see her and talk to her the real Clorinda isn't there. Where she is Heaven only knows. I've never been able to find her."

"But if I have?"

"Then you're luckier than most of us. Who's the person in mythology that turned into water whenever any one tried to seize him? Well, she's a little like that. Why she didn't marry Malcolm Grant in the first place—"

"What do you mean by the first place?"

"Oh, years ago. I mean when she made us all think—"

"If she had her reasons—"

"Oh, she had her reasons! She always has. But . . . " She held out both her hands. "Anyhow, Arthur, I wish you luck. I don't say but that if it had been Mary Galloway—"

"Don't, Maggie, don't," he cried, as he held her hands.

"Then I won't. Still, I'd have been easier in my mind. Only," she added, reflectively, "a marriage in which one

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is easy in one's mind isn't much fun, is it? It must mean an awful lack of pep. Now I come to think of it, if Leslie hadn't kept me on the jump, life wouldn't have been half so exciting; and I dare say you'll find it so with Clorinda—if she does marry you. Now I'm off to tell Leslie."

"Tell him first, and send him here to me afterward."

"I can tell him this?—about you and Clorinda?"

"You can tell him everything—all except the little joke we've decided to keep to ourselves."

Left alone, he was able by sheer mental force to thrust into the background the great query that seemed to separate Clorinda from himself, to confront the scene that must take place between him and Leslie. When Leslie came into the room each would know all about the other. Each would know, without shadow of reserve, what the same woman meant and had meant to each. They would have to talk with hearts strangely, brutally unveiled, and reach an understanding the nature of which was beyond Bainbridge's present power to guess at.

After Maggie's noisy talk the house was oddly still. Bainbridge stood in the middle of the room—waiting. He was waiting for Leslie; but more ardently he was waiting for that voice from the cloud which would tell him how he must meet his old friend.

And nothing came. That was the agonizing thing. Keeping his mind as empty and receptive as possible, there was nothing to fill it. He was without inspiration, without so much as a hint. If Leslie appeared, and no suggestion were to be vouchsafed him, he should have either to utter manufactured speeches or be dumb.

Suddenly he found himself quoting, inwardly: "And my speech was not with enticing words of men's wisdom; but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power."

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Of course! It was what he was hoping for.

"Always follow the kindest course."

The words were no more than reminiscent of a past experience.

But the snatches came more rapidly, with something like a tumult of utterance from his soul's mother-tongue. They followed hard on each other like shots from a rifle.

"Vie with one another in eagerness for peace, every one minding his own business."

"Let every one be quick to hear, slow to speak."

"I have compassion on the multitude—I have compassion."

"Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth."

"The word that God putteth into my mouth that shall I speak."

And the Lord had put no word into his mouth at all. If lightnings and thunderings and voices had come out of the cloud they had had no bearing on Leslie.

Minutes passed before Bainbridge drew his inference from this. When he did so it was with some amazement. "The word that God putteth into my mouth that shall I speak"—and God had been silent. It was an expressive silence, and an eloquent. He tiptoed softly from the room.

He was putting on his outside things in the hall when, from Leslie's little study by the door, he heard a voice. It was Maggie's voice, muffled as if her head was on her husband's shoulder. "Haven't we been fools? *Haven't we?*"

Something inaudible was mumbled on Leslie's part, and Bainbridge hurried his preparations.

Maggie was speaking again. His own name and Clorinda's were all he caught. He hurried to the door. His

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hand was actually on the knob when he heard an irrepressible exclamation from Leslie. Was it a laugh or an oath or an expression of incredulity? He didn't know. He wanted not to know—never to know. He was out in the cold, clear twilight of the city without knowing.

Not till he was actually standing on the steps with the door shut behind him did the perspiration break out on his forehead. He hardly knew why, unless it was that he had escaped a danger. If so, it was the danger of speaking—when silence was of God.

He saw then what he had not seen hitherto. The others were to be spared; but he was not. He must drain the cup of all their secrets, while they were to be left each with his or her own. Maggie was not to know more than she knew already—nor Leslie—nor Clorinda. But he was to know everything. He was to carry all three of them where he had carried so many others during the past four or five years—in his heart.

So be it; he was ready; he was able; it was obviously best. But as he went down the steps and made his way slowly and thoughtfully toward a splendid wintry sunset the inner veil seemed, if not actually lifted, a little farther off.

CHAPTER XX

IN the end the pressure of many considerations forced Bainbridge's consent to a marriage before Lent. What reluctance he felt was on Clorinda's account; and yet her persisting eagerness produced its effect on him. She made him feel like a man holding open a door to one who was running from a danger. The existence of the danger coming to be admitted by both, she persuaded him that once she was within the shelter he commanded there would be nothing more to fear.

Then, too, he began to realize that, after all, Leslie Palliser had been right. People did seem, at heart, to be in favor of the celibacy of the clergy. The announcement of his engagement came to the members of St. Mary Magdalen's as a shock. They had loved and honored him; he had been theirs and they had been his. They had felt in him an ownership to which they had never pretended in the case of Doctor Galloway, on whom Mrs. Galloway and Mary had a complete proprietary lien.

Now there had come a coldness of which Bainbridge had been made aware from the morning on which Clorinda's notes of announcement had been received. The congratulations offered him were worded neatly enough, but behind them he rarely failed to notice an undertone of reserve. Had his choice fallen on one of their own they might have felt differently; had it been Mary Galloway,

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the match would have been so fitting that there would have been no resentment. As it was, there were few who didn't feel that he or she had been dispossessed by an action whose legal right there was no means of disputing. They had simply lost him, and there was no more to be said.

That is, there was no more to be said by that minority who make the principle of living and letting live one of the first of human duties. Swallowing their disappointment, they put the most cheerful aspect on the new turn of affairs. That their beloved Mr. Bainbridge was sufficiently fallible to be captivated by a woman whom most of them knew slightly, and yet were compelled to regard as strange, elusive, irreligious, charming with a curious pagan charm, but refractory to the yokes to which they bent their own necks—all that was one of those disillusioning bits of experience to which wise people submitted with the least possible comment. In St. Mary Magdalen's there was no small number who took this stand and who resigned themselves as people must when a leader fails.

Others were more loquacious. Mrs. Endsleigh Jarrott had been one of the first to bring him her good wishes. "I'm with you heart and soul, dear Mr. Bainbridge," she had declared, holding his hand in both of hers and wringing it, "and with Clorinda, too. Knowing you both as I do, I can see what others can't, and I know—I know—you'll be right in ignoring all the hubbub and talk that people are making. I can tell you they won't bring their nonsense to me the second time. What do you think? I've as good as fallen out with Colfax Pole and Bessie Wrenn, and as for old Mrs. Wrenn, well, I wish you could have heard her. Any one would think you were breaking a contract with the parish in getting married at all. I tell

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them that if you'd picked out Mary Calloway they wouldn't have whispered a word; but now, just because you've chosen some one they're all afraid of, and jealous of, and whom they don't like merely because she's snubbed them by passing without seeing them . . . "

On the evening of that day he received a note from old Mrs. Pole, begging him to give her authority to contradict so absurd a tale. "It's the church I'm thinking of, dear Mr. Bainbridge," she wrote, affectionately. "We've all had such hard work to build up the parish that we can't afford to have anything pull it down, now can we? Not that I'm hinting a word against dear Ciorinda. No one is a warmer friend to her than I am—but I know you understand. I tell every one that there's not a syllable of truth in it—that of all the men in the world you're the one who can be trusted to do nothing unsuitable or contrary to the interests of the church—but so long as I'm not authorized to make the correction . . . "

To this sort of thing he knew that marriage would put an end. The parishioners might not take him back into their hearts and confidence, but they would cease to talk. He would probably drop into some such place in their esteem as that held by Doctor Galloway, whom they knew as a wise, far-sighted man of affairs, but to whom they never carried their sins and sorrows, because Mrs. Galloway, who was a dear, irresponsible, roly-poly thing, was terribly inquisitive. In his confusion of mind it began to seem to him that while most people would trust any man, no one was willing to trust any woman—that women would trust women least of all—though there might have been a willingness to make an exception of Mary Calloway. The conclusion he came to, therefore, was that the sooner he was married the sooner he would

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prove to his parishioners that he was not less their friend than he had been before, though it hurt him to perceive that Leslie had been right.

As for Leslie, he had met him only once since the day on which the engagement had been announced. That an understanding which was practically a reconciliation had been reached between him and Maggie he had been told by Maggie herself.

"And I had to tell him the story about him and Clorinda," she also informed him. "It was so good I couldn't keep it to myself."

Bainbridge withheld his reproaches to ask how Leslie had taken it.

"I wish you could have seen him. He was so furious that he went simply white. He couldn't speak. You know he's never liked Clorinda—never. There's something about her that offends his taste. Leslie has awfully good taste—I'll say that for him. Well, that lasted for about a minute, and then—he just roared. I've never heard him laugh so. I thought he'd hurt himself. But it wasn't all a joke with him—no, sir! It was just as you said—he was as mad as a hornet to think that any one should have coupled their names. I'll bet it was Bessie Wrenn."

After that both Bainbridge and Palliser kept apart. The former had begun indeed to recognize it as one of the difficult tasks of his future life to feel toward Leslie any of the old-time friendliness. That it must be done he knew; but that much must be overcome in himself before it could be done he also knew. Fortunately—he could use the word now—Leslie didn't know that he knew; Clorinda didn't know that he knew. He recalled Leslie's words: "God alone knows, and I propose that

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God alone shall know." Bainbridge was happy to let it be so. It was not only easiest, it was best. Leslie and Clorinda would thus be able to meet as they had been meeting in the past three years, with their secret between them, not suspecting that it was shared. If by this any one should have to suffer more than he or she had suffered already, it would only be himself.

But he came on Leslie quite unexpectedly in the library of the New Netherlands Club. It was that hour in the middle of the afternoon when one set of members had gone and another set hadn't come, and in their end of the big room they were face to face and alone. Bainbridge happened to pass in front of the chair where Leslie was stretched with a book. The latter looked up with a start; with a start Bainbridge stood still.

And then that mental effect took place which the latter had dreaded. At sight of Leslie's tall, languid form, in the easy, fashionable clothes which Maggie's money paid for—at sight of his lean, well-shaven face, with its permanent, uniform tan—at sight of his dreamy eyes with their lashes of a length and a beauty which should never belong to a man—he reconstructed the scene the veiled woman had sketched for him. It leaped into vision before him, the sudden electric force which had impelled this man to Clorinda and Clorinda to him. . . .

All the self-control of which Bainbridge had studied to make himself master was taxed to its utmost in that second. It was taxed not merely to hold him back from springing on Leslie with the lithe, leopard-like strength he knew he possessed and beating him to the floor—that would have been too idiotic; it was taxed to keep him from actively and consciously hating this man who had been his most intimate friend and despising him. He did

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despise him. He recognized the fact even when the more passionate prompting had passed. He knew that ever since Leslie had given up his work at Columbia, and had shown himself willing to live on Maggie's money, he, Bainbridge, had despised him. He knew that during the months when he had been sounding Leslie's praises to his wife and endeavoring to make a pact between them, he had despised him. He knew that when Leslie had confessed his infidelity toward Maggie, and invented the story of an actress, he had despised him. He had despised him too profoundly and subconsciously to take him to task. But when Miss Higgins had made revelations greater than she was aware of, then Leslie had become to him little less than an object of loathing.

All this having passed through his mind with a rapidity more than cinematographic he was obliged to take himself in hand. He mustn't hate Leslie; he mustn't hold him in contempt. The very reasons he had for doing both must put him on his guard against being guilty of either. He paused, therefore, and smiled in a way that could only be taken as friendly.

"Well, Leslie; you've heard the news?"

He was in a position to follow the processes of Leslie's mind as well as if he was a spectator at a play, and watch the stages of his pitiable bluff. When Palliser spoke, however, it was without raising his eyes, and with a kind of sullen uneasiness. "Yes, Arthur, I've heard the news; and now that you've been and gone and done it, of course I take back what I said the other day. If I'd been thinking of anything like this—"

Bainbridge laughed, with a bitterness that escaped his companion. "Well, what then?"

"I should have been more careful."

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"Careful in what way? You told me the truth. People are taking it just as you said they would."

"But I shouldn't have seemed like one of them—as I must to you now." Bainbridge could see him summoning all his forces to help out his little comedy. "Since that's what you've set your heart on I shall back you up, old boy. Maggie and I will stand by you, whatever fools may say."

After a few more expressions of this heartiness Bainbridge thanked his friend and went on his way. But he had no difficulty in appraising Leslie's state of mind. He was not in love with Clorinda any longer, no more than she with him. That fire of paper had blazed up and burnt itself out long ago. If Clorinda had been marrying any one else Leslie could have given her his blessing. But this particular marriage shocked him to the core. If his sin had no other punishment, it would be retribution enough that he should have to stand still and let it take place, that all his life he should have to look on at it and say nothing. It would, however, make it easier for him, if easy was the word, when once the marriage was a thing accomplished.

He felt the same toward Malcolm Grant, who had become an unquiet presence oddly pervading New York. Bainbridge met him everywhere, not only because they had the same group of friends, but because their common undertakings with regard to the European war threw them together. Beyond the fact that they were frequently in the same room, actual contact between them was rare; but actual contact was not needed to make each intensely aware of the other. Though they so seldom spoke, the silence between them said more than words, filled as it was with strange understandings.

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From Clorinda he gathered that it was the same with her. She, too, saw Malcolm Grant, meeting him in her path whichever way she turned. Whether this was from intention on his side, or from the hazards of the active life they were leading, she didn't know; she only found him there, not the less disturbing because he said little, and that little of no seeming importance. Had he aimed at weaving a spell on which she would look back with a thrill even while she ran away from it he would not have borne himself otherwise. "You and I were made for each other," he seemed to assert more emphatically than if he had used the words. "In marrying any one else you're false to your real destiny."

She was so conscious of it—Bainbridge himself was so conscious of it—that they ended by talking of it plainly. She seemed indeed willing to talk of it; it became a relief to her.

"It wouldn't matter even if it were true," she declared, in some excitement. "Nothing would ever make me change my mind. You're more to me, Arthur, than any one in the world could possibly be, after all you've done for me. As for him, I can hardly see how he dares to speak to me, or so much as to look at me, considering what he once said. If you only knew! And it wasn't merely what he said—it was the thought behind it—the thought that was worse than the words. Possibly I deserved it—but if so, it was the very fact that I did deserve it that made it so unforgivable. If I hadn't deserved it I might have ascribed it to a man who had temporarily lost his senses, and so have forgotten it. But when a woman had gone as far toward a man as I'd gone—yes, I admit that!—and still he couldn't pity her, or spare her—No, Arthur, no! The only reason why I see him at all is

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to minimize its importance. If I were to refuse to see him he'd know he'd given me a death-blow."

"A man must mean a great deal to a woman when anything he says or does can be taken by her as a death-blow."

This interpretation of her words took her by surprise. She gazed at him a moment in mild consternation, while she made up her mind to meet the charge frankly. "Well, he did mean a great deal to me. He presented a way of escape—the kind of escape I've found in you. You must remember that the very first time I saw you—that wonderful afternoon!—I let you see that it was in that way I looked on a second marriage. It was to be redemption to me. I didn't think of it as first of all a question of love—not on my side. I was ready to love any good man who'd be sorry for me as you've been, and perhaps understand me a little. I couldn't have helped loving him, not any more than a dog can help loving the man who takes it in and gives it food and drink when it's lost and starving. Oh, Arthur," she broke off, tragically, "marry me. Marry me soon. Your Lent will come round in a little more than a fortnight. Let it be before then. You don't know how grateful I'll be to you, how I'll cling to you and worship you. . . ."

And so the date was fixed for the Monday before Ash-Wednesday, and made known only to the Pallisers and Galloways. For reasons Bainbridge was never able to fathom Clorinda also confided the secret to Malcolm Grant by means of Mary Galloway, after which two unquiet presences obtruded themselves on the prospective bridegroom's field of vision.

For the first time, too, they began to roam side by side. A coalition between Mary Galloway and Malcolm Grant was so unexpected as to arouse speculation. Bainbridge

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noticed them frequently together. Sometimes it was at the breaking up of a meeting on the subject of supplies for the wounded at which Grant had been the chief speaker; sometimes it was in the street; there was a Sunday on which Grant was seated in the rector's pew and went to the rectory to lunch. A little buzzing went through the parish as to the consolation dear Mary might find in the society of the rich Canadian.

And Mary was as much, too, with Clorinda. As the wedding-day drew nearer the intimacy between them seemed to grow. In proportion as Clorinda shrank from Leslie and Maggie Palliser—Bainbridge noticed that!—she clung to the only woman who was near her and whom she was certain she could trust. In this trust Mary found apparently an assuagement of her ache at heart, and of all Clorinda's expeditions to dressmakers and shops she was the companion. Bainbridge felt, indeed, as if, in some odd way, they formed a trio, Clorinda, Mary, and Malcolm Grant, while he was a spectator and apart.

During the ten days before Lent he was struck with this—not suspiciously or anxiously, or at least not more suspiciously or anxiously than before. He was only curious as to what it portended, or as to whether or not it portended anything. It was only on the evening before the day set for his marriage that he learned that it portended nothing at all—as far as Mary Galloway was concerned.

"I can't help it if he tells me things," she replied to one of Bainbridge's questions—questions which he knew to be indiscreet.

They were in the rectory drawing-room, where Doctor and Mrs. Galloway had left them alone, not from intention, but because they had been summoned to the telephone.

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As far as Bainbridge had observed, neither of Mary's parents had ever planned anything between him and her, or had betrayed by so much as a sigh a perception that their daughter was suffering. They had asked him to their Sunday-night supper as a sign of informal farewell, and had asked Clorinda with him. Clorinda had declined on the ground that, the ceremony being fixed for eight the next morning, she needed the time for preparation and rest; but Bainbridge had been secretly glad of this friendly refuge for his last unmarried evening, especially with his accumulated burden of thought. In other circumstances the house in Sixty-ninth Street would have been his natural resort, but he had been unable as yet to overcome a sense of discomfort in going there. Nevertheless, Maggie and Leslie were to be at the service on the following morning, as neither Leslie nor Clorinda could afford to have it otherwise.

"If he tells you things," Bainbridge felt himself provoked to say, as he and Mary sat in the glow of the vellum shade painted in fruits and flowers, "it's probably in the hope that you'll repeat them to Clorinda."

"He's never said so."

"But what have you thought?"

"Oh, I've thought that."

"And have you done it?"

"Not always."

"But sometimes."

"When I saw no harm in it."

"And Clorinda—was she glad or sorry?"

"If there was anything to make her sorry I didn't tell it."

"So that he said things that made her glad. Glad in what way?"

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"In whatever way the thing he said might happen to apply."

"That is, there were many ways."

"There were *some* ways."

"And some ways in which he could have made her sorry if you'd told her what he said. What kind of ways would they have been?"

She glanced up at him, with the light that used to be mockery in the sparkle of her eye. "Suppose you ask her."

"I have asked her. She hasn't any secrets from me—now—" he subjoined the words, "I think." It was her odd expression that prompted him to add, "What should you say?"

"What can I say but what you say yourself? How should I know?"

He laughed. "Oh, you'd know, all right." He went on, with emphasis, "You do know, don't you?"

"If I knew anything Clorinda hasn't told you, do you think I ought to betray it?"

"I think you might judge. Considering your position of—of friendship toward all of us—"

She surprised him by getting up in the middle of his sentence and moving to a seat in the obscurity, farther off. "You're going to be married to-morrow morning—" she began.

"He's gone to see her this evening," Bainbridge interrupted, abruptly. "She gave him leave to come. That's one reason why she couldn't be here. You knew that, didn't you?"

"Yes; I knew it both from him and from her. He's gone to give her a wedding-present. She could hardly refuse to receive him when that was his excuse."

"What's he giving her?"

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"He wanted to give her a ring, but she wouldn't take it"—Bainbridge put his hand to his breast, where he could feel a half-hoop of diamonds, suspended by a ribbon, cutting into his flesh—"so he's made it a bracelet."

"And she's going to take that?"

"She couldn't help herself without being rude."

For a minute he made no response, staring meditatively at the floor. When he looked up it was to say, brusquely,

"Did you know her when he was about here, two or three years ago?"

"Oh yes. Not as well as I do now, but—"

"And what did you think?"

She tried to take this indifferently. "Oh, just what everybody else thought. People have experiences like that, but they pass—"

"Did this pass?"

"What do you mean?"

"What I'm asking you. She was in love with him then. Isn't she still in love with him?"

Again she got up, moving to another spot in the room. From the angle between the wall and the projecting chimneypiece, with her hand resting lightly on the mantel, she said: "I wish you wouldn't ask me things like that—when you're going to be married to-morrow morning."

"Oh, but I'm not going to be married for love; that is," he subjoined, "not on her side—not what I call love."

"But if she calls it love—"

"She doesn't—except with qualifications that do away with the meaning of the word. She's marrying me—out of respect."

"But if it's a respect so deep—"

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He laughed again. "Oh yes, very deep; and yet not so deep but what—but what it has a bottom." Springing to his feet, he followed her to her refuge in the angle of the chimneypiece, where there was no light to fall on her face. He hardly knew what urged him on. The idea he wanted to express had never come actively into his mind before. It had been there latently, but not in a way that had ever permitted him to suspect it. "Mary, tell me." At the sound of her name on his lips, a sound she had never before heard, she shrank farther back. "Tell me, Mary. What's the matter with her respect for me? It's splendid—and yet—and yet she has reserves even there."

"I don't know what you mean," she declared, helplessly.

"She must have talked to you about me. Women always talk to some other woman. You probably know more of us than we know of ourselves. She's told you what it is about me—what it is I haven't got—that keeps her from really caring anything about me. Oh, Mary," he pleaded, "it means a lot to me. We're going to be married to-morrow morning, and if I'm ever to—"

He could see her lips moving, faintly. When he thought it over afterward he could do justice to the struggle she was going through. He was sure she would rather have torn out her tongue than interfere between Clorinda and himself, that nothing but the fact that he had adjured her by her position of friendship toward them all had influenced her to speak. Even so it was with a kind of terrified panting that she got the words out.

"She never said anything to me—but once."

He knew he was getting near the heart of the secret he wanted to fathom. "And then it was—? Go on."

"She said—she said she'd told you something—she

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didn't say what it was—and I've no idea—but she told you—and you'd taken it—I forget the exact word she used—but I think it was—too leniently."

"Too leniently?" he cried. "She said that?"

"Oh, but not the way I'm putting it. She meant—I know what she meant," she struggled on, "or I think I do; but it's hard to put into words. She said she'd told the same thing to another man—she didn't say who—but I guessed—and he almost—he almost trampled her under his feet."

"And she liked that better?" Something that was indignation as much as it was anguish compelled him to ask the question with a shout.

"No; she didn't like it better; she only thought—oh, why do you make me say it?—she only thought it was the way a man who was going to marry a woman would feel—naturally—and the way he would act—brutally was the word she used there—I remember now—she said that if he didn't think and act brutally—in such circumstances—it was a sign that he wasn't wholly a man—or something like that—but that he was too much—too much like God—"

He laughed aloud with an irreverence that shocked himself. "And she didn't want to marry God—of course not!"

"Oh, don't misunderstand her—"

"I don't misunderstand her. I know exactly what—"

But Doctor and Mrs. Galloway having appeared on the threshold, he was obliged to break off. When after a vain endeavor to recapture the tone of ordinary conversation, he stammered his good-nights, the rector accompanied him to the door. There was no serious leave-taking, nor any reference to the event of the next day beyond the assur-

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ance that Bainbridge could feel quite easy in his mind as to taking his fortnight's leave.

But as he walked homeward the young man recalled the words he had read in a translation of a Russian play:

"A woman likes admiration, but she gives herself only to the man who despises her a little."

Malcolm Grant had despised Clorinda—despised her yet, perhaps—and he had not!

Or had he? *Did* he despise her as he despised Leslie? In his heart of hearts was he really treating her brutally?—or was he too much like God?

All his life he had thought it his duty to be as much like God as possible; but was it the way to win an earthly and intensely human woman's love?

CHAPTER XXI

THOUGH the ceremony was not to take place till eight, Bainbridge was at the church before seven, letting himself in by the vestry door, turning on a discreet light or two, and unlocking the main entrance. He did this himself, since it had been considered prudent not to give away the secret by sharing it with the sexton. Caution had become the more necessary for the reason that on the preceding Saturday the periodical to which Miss Higgins remained a contributor foretold the approaching nuptials with a startling degree of exactitude. In the kindly, almost caressing, notice of Mrs. Gildersleeve and himself Bainbridge read the signs of Miss Higgins's gratitude, as well as of her new tone toward her public. In the matter of the ceremony he admired her faculty for putting two and two together even though it threatened some inconvenience to himself.

Having finished his tasks, he went into a pew and knelt down. He did this from habit rather than from a spirit of devotion, for no more than on the day when he had brought here the knowledge that Leslie was the man did he pray. That is, he formed no sentences, he used no words; it was a question as to whether or not he had clearly defined thoughts. Where everything was so complicated clearly defined thoughts were difficult. All he could do in the matter of prayer was to know himself in the hand of

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God, and to be patient till the lifting of the veil. *That* was still down, hung closely in front of him, shutting in his vision, shutting out the prospect, forbidding him to see an inch beyond that minute and that spot.

Once he found himself muttering in actual words, "I've tried to do right—taking each thing as it came—doing my best to see what it meant—and to follow where it led—and therefore nothing but the right can come of it."

In this conviction he knelt and waited, while the wan daylight stole into the cavernous arches above his head, waking them into grayness. Except for the one or two lights he had turned on near the vestry door the chancel and nave remained dark.

By and by a spot like a ruby appeared in the great window over the altar. Later there was another spot like an amethyst, and another like a sapphire, and another like an emerald, and another like a topaz, and another like a rivulet of running liquid gold. They formed no picture; they were scattered, irrelevant; they had no rich, palpitating lights; they merely glowed with the luminous dullness of ancient precious things that have long lain rayless in the dark.

He was still gazing absently when he saw the ruby deepen and quiver and spread and become a robe over the figure of a reclining man; the running liquid gold was a kneeling woman's hair; the amethyst came from the purple shades in an alabaster box; the topaz was the pavement on which it stood, the emerald a palm-tree seen through a rounded arch, and the sapphire the sky. It all came softly, pulsatingly, like a sunrise; only, unlike a sunrise, it remained.

It remained and seemed to live; it seemed to live and

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bring a message. Was it for this that, fifty years before, the church had been dedicated to St. Mary Magdalen, no one quite knowing the reason why? Had there been a wisdom which foresaw that a woman not then born—a curious, complex twentieth-century woman, mysterious, self-contradictory, penitent and impenitent at once, seemingly whole-hearted and yet with strange, unexpected reserves—would bring her sins where Mary Magdalen brought hers? Had he himself, kneeling in the gray light of a February morning, been visible to that foreknowledge? and had it been preordained that through color and light and the work of some unnamed artificer in beauty he should be reminded again that, whatever the majority of men might do, he couldn't treat a woman otherwise than as his Master?

He put these questions with some intensity, for the reason that of all he had had to learn nothing had been quite so bitter as that Clorinda contemned a little, if only a little, the pardon that gave her happiness. Malcolm Grant had treated her brutally, had outraged her pride and spurned her womanhood—and yet it was to him she turned as to a man! She was marrying to be revenged on him; and her eagerness to be revenged on him was inspired by a score of obscure feminine impulses which paid no heed to the argument that they defeated their own ends. In that sense he, Arthur Bainbridge, was but the instrument to her hand, even if, in another sense, he was the saint at whose feet she was ready to prostrate herself. It came to him for the first time, it came to him rather sickeningly, that Clorinda, with all her dignity and sweetness and outward charm, was one of those ardent, ill-regulated woman-souls whose prompting is always to throw themselves at some man's feet,

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either to be raised up or trampled on—and perhaps trampled on for preference.

But the light quivered and beat and stole on the senses imperceptibly, and all through the church objects began to stand out in it and gleaming things to give back its rays. Now it was the polished wrought iron of the pulpit steps; now it was the symbolic brazen eagle that bore up the Bible; now it was the candlesticks on the altar; lastly it was the cross. As sunrise drew near the cross glowed more and more brightly. To Bainbridge's eyes, as he gazed with an almost hypnotic gazing, it seemed to become a living, blazing thing, like the light of the world.

His musings, in as far as they were conscious, were disturbed at last by the opening of the door leading from the porch. This was followed by a whispering. Guessing that Leslie and Maggie had arrived, he rose from his knees and went to the back of the church to greet them. The act dispelled whatever was exalted in his frame of mind and brought him down to the level of common realities. There was no light or color or mystical meaning here, nor even ordinary comfort.

It was Maggie who remarked that the church was cold, and less like a wedding than any spot she had ever seen in her life. "We really should have done something to keep it from being so dismal. It would be terrible if Clorinda, who has never liked churches, anyhow, should take a worse turn against them now. And by the way, who's coming with her? I've thought it strange that she shouldn't ask Leslie to give her away."

Leslie moved off to read the inscription on a tablet near the door while Bainbridge explained that it was Clorinda's express desire to come to the church alone.

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They had arranged with Doctor Galloway that the detail in the service in which the bride is passed from hand to hand should be omitted. A woman who, like Clorinda, was independent in every sense of the word didn't need to be "given away" by any one. Maggie shook her head over this deviation from custom.

"I must say I never heard of a bride coming to the church all by herself. It doesn't seem to me quite decent. I've been wondering for the last week why she didn't ask Leslie, who seems to me the most proper person—but if she didn't want him, why there was old Doctor Rintoul." Maggie looked up toward the altar, where the cross was the more luminous against the pre-Lenten violet hangings. "Not a flower," she complained, "not a leaf! Well, I never! I wonder you don't have some one to play the 'Dead March' in 'Saul.'"

Bainbridge smiled faintly. He was curiously numb now, and indifferent. He could hardly believe that the supreme hour was at hand. Clorinda herself and all the questions she raised seemed to fade away. The odd thing was that he should be there at all in that extraordinary manner—that Maggie and Leslie, slightly ill-tempered at having to be out so early, should be keeping him company—and that he hadn't had his breakfast.

Such thoughts as these were in his mind when he heard a movement in the vestry, and knew that Doctor Galloway had also come. The huge old man looked huger than ever in his surplice when Bainbridge entered the robing-room. Their greetings were brief, their intercourse prosaic. As they went over again certain details of the Lenten services, of certain meetings at which Bainbridge's place would have to be supplied while he was away, there was the same unromantic feeling that had pervaded the short

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conversation with Maggie. The earliness of the hour, the dreariness, the cold had affected the spirits of them all.

On returning to the church Bainbridge found Leslie and Maggie seated side by side in a pew near the top. Half-way down on the other side Mary Galloway was on her knees, her head bowed upon her hands. He himself took his place at the foot of the chancel steps, waiting for Clorinda.

It was what Clorinda had wished. She preferred to do everything alone. Any one with her, she said, would give her more trouble than companionship. She wanted to be free to think of nothing but the thing she had to do.

On the stroke of eight she appeared, opening and closing the door for herself, and standing for a second or two looking up the long, empty church. Dressed as if for the street in some rich shade of heilotrope, the only unusual note in her costume was that her hands were bare. After the first brief instant of inspection she began to walk slowly up the aisle.

It was the slowness that drew Bainbridge's attention as he looked and waited. It was not a ceremonial slowness, not the measured dignity of one taking part in a high solemnity. He knew that her natural manner would have been to come to him swiftly, with the urging forward of her impetuous character. That she took each step with hesitation meant either reluctance or pain.

But she shook her head when he made a movement as if to go down the aisle to her assistance. For him to do so would have been a breach of the ritual it had been her will to decree. "I want to come to you of my own accord—to do it all myself," she had insisted more than once; and there had been nothing for it but to let her have her way.

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Nevertheless, even as she shook her head she paused for a second, with her hand on the door of the nearest pew. She was resting, or getting her breath. In the circumstances it was doubtless natural that she should be somewhat overcome. Luckily, neither Mary Galloway nor the Pallisers had heard her approach or looked behind, so that as yet the only spectators were the rector and himself.

But as Clorinda came forward again and rested again, now leaning on the door of a pew somewhat heavily, Maggie glanced backward, springing to her feet and giving her husband a push. "For mercy's sake, Leslie," she cried, in a loud whisper, "do go and give her your arm. Can't you see she's not well?"

It was the circumstance that three of those present were most eager to avoid. Leslie's great eyes gazed toward Clorinda, with the words, "Must I? Dare I?" written in their glance. But neither Bainbridge nor Clorinda waited for him to move. The one hastened down the aisle, and the other upward, so that she reached the chancel steps breathless and perturbed.

Instantly the rector's voice began to recite, somewhat asthmatically, "Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God and in the face of this company to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony; which is an honorable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and His Church."

Bainbridge felt her hand clutch his arm with a positive need of support. He had never known any one to tremble so violently and yet remain standing. He was swept by an immense pity for her. More than at any previous minute he was sure she was doing this thing wilfully,

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against her better judgment, though with the conviction that it was the highest road to take. It was too late to dissuade her now. It would have been impossible to dissuade her at any time, even if he had been so inclined, and whether he had been so inclined or no he found it impossible to tell. All he could do at the instant was to recall the words he had once spoken to Malcolm Grant, and which straggled back to him now through unfrequented byways of the memory: "A man's love can do anything for a woman—if it's big enough and true enough and strong enough." There and then he registered a great and sacred vow to make his love of that sort, so that, come what might, the woman trembling on his arm should find herself blessed. The doctor continued to wheeze on.

"Into this holy estate these two persons present come now to be joined. If any man can show just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together let him now speak, or else hereafter forever hold his peace."

The pause was solemn, it was almost menacing. It was as if the celebrant expected some dramatic intervention. Bainbridge was so moved by it that involuntarily he glanced at Clorinda, who stood with head bowed like a lily on its stalk, and then round toward the three witnesses. Of these Maggie alone maintained the conventional manner of the interested spectator. Leslie stood with eyes raised and looking far away, as if he was studying the Magdalen in stained glass. Mary Galloway was still on her knees, her face buried in her hands.

The voice resumed, in a lower and more intimate key:
"I require and charge you both, as ye shall answer at the dreadful day of judgment, when the secrets of all

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hearts shall be disclosed, that if either of you know any impediment, why ye may not lawfully be joined together in matrimony ye do now confess it."

Again Bainbridge glanced with that curious half-expectation at the woman who had come there to be his wife. It was giving her another chance. If she refused to take it the responsibility would be hers. He himself would then be free to seize the cup of his joy with both hands—even though the mixture within held so large an infusion of wormwood.

Again there was a pause; but again Clorinda made no movement. Though she still trembled, she allowed him to detach her hand from his arm and clasp it within his own. Facing her directly, as they now stood, he could see that she was white with the bloodlessness of death, and that her pale lips quivered like a child's. Nevertheless, she maintained a certain measure of composure as the rector put his question:

"Arthur, wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honor and keep her in sickness and in health; and forsaking all others keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?"

Bainbridge, who had weighed each word, felt that the circumstances required from him an exceptional warmth of affirmation. His "I will" rang through the hollow recesses of the church.

"Clorinda, wilt thou have this man to thy wedded husband, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of—?"

"Wait."

The word was whispered so faintly that the old rector

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didn't hear it. He had already begun on the word "matrimony" when Bainbridge himself said, hurriedly:

"Wait. Something's the matter. She's—she's not well."

Clorinda was now leaning on him, as if about to faint. "No, I'm not well," she whispered. "I must—I must sit down."

Her swaying was such that Maggie, with a smothered exclamation, sprang forward, catching her as she reeled. Between them they led her the few steps to the nearest pew, where she sat down.

"I shall be all right in a minute," she managed to say, with a smile of apology which scarcely reached her lips. "Then we can go on."

"Leslie, run into the vestry and get a glass of water," Maggie commanded.

Leslie ran, and during the minutes of his absence Clorinda, supported by Maggie, endeavored to smile, without succeeding. The rector had descended the steps and, prayer-book in hand, stood looking down on the sufferer sympathetically. Mary Galloway had left her pew, but made no attempt to come up the aisle. For once when there was need of her she held herself aloof.

"It's the hour," Maggie declared. "I said from the first that it was too ridiculously early."

Clorinda murmured, faintly: "I shall be better soon. Then we can go on again."

But when Leslie returned with the water and she had taken a few sips she was still unable to stand. Having made the effort, she relapsed again, seeming for a second or two about to lose consciousness. The efforts were repeated, with the same result. Tears came into her eyes as her head sank on Maggie's shoulder. "I'm very

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silly," she whispered again; "but it's what I ought to have expected."

It was Bainbridge's impulse to ask why. Though he refrained from doing so, her words remained in his memory. She allowed him to sit beside her and take her limp, cold hand in his, but her only recognition of him was in the occasional look of unspeakable tenderness, which tried to make itself a smile, she occasionally turned toward him.

It was Maggie who said at last, with decision: "It's got to be put off. Here it is nearly nine o'clock and she's not able to stand up yet. I said from the first that eight was absurd. Doctor Galloway can come up to the house later in the day and have the service there."

But later in the day there was no opportunity. Clorinda was confined to her room and her bed, and could see no one but Maggie, who had installed herself as nurse. When old Doctor Rintoul was summoned he said she was suffering from shock following on prolonged nervous strain. On Bainbridge's explaining that though she might have been under a nervous strain, there had been nothing in the nature of a shock, he shook his shaggy gray head and thrust out his big under lip, saying that in that case her condition couldn't be accounted for.

So Shrove Tuesday passed, and Ash Wednesday passed, and Lent began, and Bainbridge didn't go away. There was nothing to go away for. Instead, he went quietly about his work, wondering and praying, and waiting for the day when he should be able to see Clorinda. Till he could do so all was of necessity obscure to him. The veil was not only dense before him; it was entangling and confusing about his feet. He could attend to nothing but his obvious duties, scarcely daring so much as to think.

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When Maggie had departed to her own house, and nurses took her place, it began to be evident that Clorinda was not merely indisposed, but ill.

"I can't make her out," Maggie complained to him. "I've done everything I can and was willing to do more; but she doesn't seem to want me. She's as good as said that she'd rather have Mary Galloway; and so Mary Galloway she has. Well, every one to their taste! I'm the last person to force myself where I'm not wanted. I thought she seemed strange the day I suggested that Leslie should go with her to the church and give her away. The Lord knows I didn't care—except for the look of things. The idea of her coming all by herself like that! No wonder she's broken down—and all the rest of it."

It was only from Mary Galloway, therefore, that Bainbridge got any news—and she gave him very little. As far as he could observe, she seemed to have relapsed into that methodical keeping out of his sight which he had noticed in her during previous years. He knew she flitted from the rectory to the church and from the church to Clorinda's, shadowy and spirit-like, but he rarely got a glimpse of her. When he did, her answers to his questions had little variety.

"She's about the same. No, she hasn't been up yet. Doctor Rintoul says he doesn't know when she'll be able to see any one but the nurses and me. No, she can't talk much—very little. She asks after you, but only in a general way, as to how you are and what you are doing and that sort of thing. But then for hour after hour she just lies there and doesn't say anything at all."

"Does she ever speak of Malcolm Grant?"

"Never."

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On one occasion he asked the question, "What's really the matter with her—*really?*"

She began to move away from him. "Doctor Rintoul insists that she's had a shock."

"But what shock *can* she have had?"

She shook her head and said nothing.

"Malcolm Grant was with her the evening before—"

"I don't know anything about that," she said, hurriedly, adding over her shoulder as she left him, "She's never said anything about it—and I haven't an idea."

But Bainbridge brooded over the suspicion as he wondered and prayed and worked. He looked haggard and much older. The question as to his own position began to trouble him. Was he still engaged to her? Might he be said to be married to her? There was of course no legal marriage, but he had actually pronounced his "I will" before witnesses. Since she had gone so far, was she bound in honor—was he bound in honor—to go on with the ceremony as soon as circumstances would allow? Or had all his romance faded into unreality and insubstantiality with Clorinda's withdrawal into a vague unseen?

It was with some thought of this heartbreaking possibility that he said one day to Doctor Galloway, "If it seemed advisable, could I have leave of absence to go over to France for a few months to see what I could do?"

The rector hung up his surplice in the closet appropriated to his vestments, saying as he did so, "Do—in what capacity?"

Bainbridge, who was in his street clothes, stood by the huge table laden with books and registers that held the center of the vestry. "I was thinking of work as am-

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balance-driver or stretcher-bearer; but I should be willing to do anything for which they'd take me on."

The rector turned in his shirt-sleeves with his coat in his hand. "You can have any leave of absence you like provided—provided you don't take it in a hurry."

"I shouldn't take it in a hurry in any case; but why the proviso?"

The old man swung on his coat with a slow roll of his great bulk. "Because life works out, and we've got to give it time. We can't *work* it out. It's the error of the young and the eager to think that we can—that we're obliged to take the bull by the horns and intervene. Mistake, Bainbridge. All things work together for good to those who will let them. If it should prove to be a wise thing for you to go over to France it will become obvious." There was a tender note in the asthmatic old voice as he added, "Don't attempt it till it does."

Bainbridge reflected on this advice. "What do we mean by all things working together for good?" he asked at last. "Is it working together for happiness?"

"It is—in the sense that the happy thing is the high thing. It's more than a platitude or a bit of sententiousness to say that happiness isn't in conditions; it's in what conditions make of us." A smile dawned over the Buddha-like features as he went on to say: "A happy ending to a book, for instance, isn't the ending where the hero and heroine marry and have a good time; it's that in which they're left aiming up instead of going downward. The bliss of an impending wedding ceremony used to be the ideal of young girls, but even the young girls nowadays, I think, have got over that. To you and me—to all men and women—not to marry can be as

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hopeful a sign as to marry, when we see in it a fine soul wrestling with a great experience."

Bainbridge wondered whether in this there was a reference to himself; but if so it was the nearest the old man ever came to it. Now and then he asked, casually, "How is Mrs. Gildersleeve?" but he paid little or no attention to the answer. Bainbridge wondered if he knew the heart-searching process his assistant was going through, or so much as cared.

Only once during Lent did Bainbridge come to actual speech with Malcolm Grant, though they continued to see each other at meetings where war was the topic and both were frequently speakers. While it could not be said that they avoided each other, as Leslie and he avoided each other, the ebb and flow of an audience kept them easily apart. Bainbridge had not noticed that he looked older himself, but he did notice it in the case of his rival. Day by day the lines of his face appeared to be deeper cut, while what had been fleshliness and vacancy steadily yielded to some form of inner struggle. Bainbridge did him the justice to think that the conflict in that quarter was not less violent than in his own.

But they met quite accidentally at the corner of a street leading from Fifth Avenue. They were on their way to a drawing-room meeting at which Grant was to stir sympathy by reading some of his letters from the front. It was in days when the sharing of such interests was still new.

Since it was necessary to walk the few hundred yards together, they managed to do so without a too visible embarrassment. It was when the first commonplaces had been passed that Grant surprised the younger man with the simple question, "How is Mrs. Gildersleeve?"

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Bainbridge having replied warily that though there was not much change she was, if anything, a little better, the baronet said, abruptly:

"I'm afraid you think I had something to do with that." Before Bainbridge could rally, the speaker went on to add, "If so, it was quite inadvertently."

The natural inquiry was, "Inadvertently—in what way?"

"I can't tell you in what way. I only know that she—that she fainted."

Bainbridge stopped in his walk, so that they confronted each other. "Fainted—what for?"

"I tell you I don't know. I thought at the time it was for joy. Does take women that way sometimes, especially when they've been under a strain."

Bainbridge looked puzzled. "I don't follow you."

The other tried to explain. "It was the evening before—before you were to have been married. I ought to tell you now that I'd given up—everything. I'd begun to see that you—that you were the chap."

"Oh!" The ejaculation was just audible.

"Yes, old man. I'd watched—and considered—and thought you over—and, hang it all! I'd made up my mind that you deserved her. I give you my word that I only went to see her to offer her a trifle of a present—and tell her that."

"And she fainted?"

He nodded. "I remembered what you'd said to me the last time we talked it over. You said that you'd leave the whole thing to the principle of right and wrong—and whichever of us was most in the right would get her. Well, I thought I was a sure winner on right till—till I began to see how you'd stood by her." Laying a hand on

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the clergyman's shoulder, he looked down into his eyes with a smile. "You've been a corker, old chap—"

"Yes, but why should she faint?"

He removed his hand, his face growing grave again. "Before God, old man, I don't know. She followed me easily enough while I was sizing you up and saying what a good un you'd been—what?—and then all at once—when we were talking of the afternoon you and she came in and found me waiting—you remember!—and I was saying how magnificently you'd risen to that—when you'd never known—what?—and of course I couldn't help referring to the circumstances of three and four years ago—but I did it delicately—the way she likes—well, all I can say is that she just toppled over like a rag—like a dead woman—and if I hadn't caught her she'd have tumbled off the chair. Luckily there was a bell within reach, and when I'd pressed it that little Pansy girl—the pretty one—came running in, and acted like a brick. She knew what to do—and brought her round—but—but—I had to make myself scarce, of course. Since then I haven't—"

For lack of anything more to say they walked on again in silence. Bainbridge was again struggling with himself. All his nerve had been strained to keep from shouting "You fool!" in the face of this good fellow who had thought he was doing him a service. Something, he felt, he must say—something that would relieve his excitement and show this blunderer the harm he had done unwittingly. If the fact that it was unwitting might be pleaded as an excuse, it was also a reason for plain speaking. He was actually phrasing a sentence that would not only be neat and courteous, but would also tell this great simpleton something he would never forget—when he remembered.

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He had once been near to speaking to Clorinda—he had been nearer speaking to Leslie—when, after all, silence had been of God. Silence was probably of God in this case, too; and so they went onward to the door without breaking it.

he had
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CHAPTER XXII

THUS Malcolm Grant never knew what he had done, nor did Bainbridge ever refer to it. He had one secret the more to keep, and that was all. He made no mention of it even when Clorinda sent for him and all the veils were lifted.

That was a morning in April, when he had not seen her for nearly two months. He found her changed, emaciated, with some of her beauty gone. In her indefinable charm she had gained, however, as well as in that air of sorrow and mystery that had at all times hung about her like a magic cloak.

She was half seated, half reclining, in a long chair near the window of an up-stairs sitting-room on the third floor—a fairy garden of flowered chintz. Bowls of daffodils and tulips stood about, and the sunshine was not so hot as to need tempering.

She allowed him to kiss her hand, though waving him away with a slight gesture when he attempted to repeat the homage on her lips. By methods so delicate and so deft as to defy his power of analysis she managed to convey to him the impression that they met on a new footing. He noticed that she no longer wore the ring he had given her, nor any but her wedding-ring, though this he could attribute to the fact that her finger had grown so thin that even the gold band was loose on it.

The aerial effect of her laces and tissues and gauzes,

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blending in hue from white to lilac, and from lilac to pale rose, made of her something rare and spiritualized, that came within his sphere only through the exceeding tender cordiality of her greeting. Nothing could have been more cordial, nor more tender, nor more remote. She seemed to have been carried away from him, to be obliged to come back toward him over some abyss of experience which she, nevertheless, could not pass. She might have been standing on the other brink of it, and merely holding out her hands. The talk turned first on himself, his plans, his doings, small things of which the details seemed to give her pleasure. He got the idea, however, that her interest was less in what he told her than in himself, and that in himself it was not so much *for* himself as because of a number of considerations which she saw as centering around him. Now and then, when he had answered a question, she asked it again some minutes later, which proved to him that her attention was not on what he was telling her.

Of herself she was disinclined to say more than that she was better, that physically she was almost well.

"But not mentally?" he asked, with anxiety.

"Oh, is one ever well mentally? I never have been—though, as I look back it seems to me as if I had been on the way to becoming so, if you hadn't—if he hadn't—Tell me," she began, again, elliptically, "do you believe in what one might call a great corrective, as part of life? I see you don't understand me," she hastened to add. "What I mean is this: is there anything that takes care of people when they're about to make mistakes, and that keeps them from making them?"

"Why are you asking me?" he demanded, quickly.

"Is it because—?"

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"Let us come to that later. I'm more interested in the question I've put than in anything else in the world. All through these weeks when I've been lying here as if I was thinking of nothing at all I've been turning it over. Are people ever held back from doing things that would injure either themselves or some one else?"

He tried to tear his mind away from the image of weakness and wistfulness, of loveliness and seductiveness, on which he felt his eyes couldn't rest eagerly enough, to give himself to the subject she had raised. "What sort of people?" he found himself able to inquire.

"Oh, people who want to do right—not good people," she corrected, "but people who haven't been good, and are only trying—and longing."

"Doesn't that hark back to the question as to whether there's a power working in us and through us, with a purpose and a love—or whether we're just splashing about on our own?"

"I suppose it does. But which is it?"

"Which do you think?"

"I don't want to think. I want you to tell me."

"And I'm not going to, for the reason that it wouldn't do any good. What I believe won't be of any help to you; and nothing will be but what you work out for yourself."

She rested awhile silently, saying at last, without looking up at him, "And suppose I worked out that on that morning when we—when we went to the church there *was* a power—working in us and through us—with a purpose and a love—that kept us from doing what we went there to do?"

"You'd have to go farther back. You'd have to inquire why that power should have led us to the church in the first place—"

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"But did it?"

"But didn't it?"

"Let us try to see. No, let me do it," she interposed, as he was about to speak. She was looking at him now, not directly, but with an oblique regard of her profound eyes. "You and I met—strangely. If I had had any suspicion of what was to happen from my going to you that afternoon I never should have gone."

"Oh yes, you would—if you could have foreseen how I should love you."

She allowed her hand to remain in his when he had seized it and pressed it to his lips. "Yes; perhaps you're right. If I could have foreseen that I should probably have done it. It would have been the simplest way of telling you—the truth."

"Haven't we finished with that? Didn't we agree long ago that enough had been said about it—?"

"We agreed that enough had been said about a subject of which—of which you knew nothing at all."

"But if I know about it now—and it doesn't make any difference—"

"Ah, if it didn't!"

"But it doesn't. Can't you see—?"

"I can see that you're the most wonderfully chivalrous man who ever lived. In the days when I thought you *knew*—when we were always talking at cross-purposes—I thought no chivalry could be greater than yours; but now—"

"Then why talk about it? Why not let it be the groundwork of our love—what we have under our feet?"

"It isn't under *my* feet. It's over my head—it's the firmament—the sky—the great mystery—the phenomenon that makes me think of God."

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The words burst from his lips with the accumulated force of two months of brooding on the point. "But no woman wants to marry God. She wants to marry a man. I'm a man, Clorinda, just as much as you're a woman." He seized both her hands and crushed them, as he leaned over her, his face near hers. "Oh, don't put a halo round me and set me up in stained glass, or see me as anything but just the faulty and humble human being that I am."

She managed to withdraw her hands and to put distance between them. "I can only see you as you appear to me. You may be a faulty and humble human being, as you say, but I've never perceived it, and I perceive it less than ever now."

"But you *must* perceive it—because, if you did, you'd love me—"

"I've told you already that I do love you—with a special kind of love."

"The kind of love one feels for a clergyman," he cried, bitterly.

"I withdraw the word clergyman," she smiled, very gently. "I used it because I couldn't think of anything else. I see now that I mean, rather, the kind of love—don't be shocked!—that Mary Magdalen and the other women in the New Testament must have felt toward the Saviour. No, I'm really sincere. It *is* love. It's the most beautiful and heavenly thing—"

"But if I tell you that you're wrong?" he demanded, passionately. "If I confess to you that I was never as gentle as you seem to think—that I was never lenient—that I'm human and gross—that essentially I'm brutal—as brutal as—as—"

Before the name which the comparison brought up

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could pass his lips she interrupted him with her faint, sweet smile. "Then you'd hurt *me*, without doing yourself any good. When you destroy an ideal as we're so often inclined to do, you leave nothing but—destruction. You can't turn a crystal vase into a common jug just by the process of breaking it. It's a crystal vase—or it's nothing. But you don't let me explain," she hurried on, as he was about to protest again. "Do you remember that on that afternoon—that wonderful afternoon!—you said that I should never find my way until I had turned toward Good? Well, I think I've done it—now—at last."

"What do you mean by now?—at last?"

"Since I've fully understood what you did for me." Her expression grew radiant as she added, "It's taught me what I must do for you."

"What you must do for me, Clorinda, is—"

She continued, serenely: "I thought you had already done as much for me as one human being could do for another. I never supposed that human goodness could go so far as you went that day—that day when we came in and found Malcolm Grant—and all the things you didn't really know till then must have come crowding in on you—"

"If you want me to tell you exactly what was in my heart toward you—" he broke in, excitedly.

"No, I don't. I've nothing to do with exactly what was in your heart. I only saw what you did—and what I didn't understand till—till the night before we went to the church. Oh, I don't say that it wasn't a great blow to me when—just by a slip of some one's tongue—I found it out. My whole world seemed to go to pieces. All the happiness I'd built up on the idea that you knew—"

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that you knew from the first—was shivered to atoms around me. I thought it would kill me. On that morning in the church it seemed to me as if I must die. I couldn't see what else I could do—then—so late—but simply go on as I'd promised you—and yet . . . I told you it was what I ought to have expected—that I should break down—didn't I? What I really thought—what I almost hoped for—was that I might be struck dead before the service could be ended. That's why I've asked you about the great corrective—the something that holds us back—that guides us, if you like—or protects us. I'm not thinking of it about me, but about you—”

He broke in, with a groan, “Oh, Clorinda, why should we go over all this now?”

“For this reason, that during all these weeks I've been thinking of it, and realizing that the strength to do what you did that day—to sit still and talk and betray nothing—and never betray anything afterward—so that if it hadn't been for an accident—just an expression or two—I might have married you and never known it—I've realized that the strength to do that kind of thing doesn't come to any man all at once, nor except after years of self-training—”

“To me it came because I loved you, Clorinda—and in no other way.”

“No; it would have come to you whether you had loved me or not. It would have come to you on behalf of any poor soul in a desperate place—as I was—no matter who. Not that that takes anything away from your wonderful act toward me. On the contrary, it only makes it the *more* wonderful. What I want you to understand is that it has set me asking how people do such things at all.”

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"They do them for love. That's the source of the energy."

"Yes, so I see. But love is one of the most mysterious words in the language, and it's only through you that I'm beginning to see some of the wealth of its meaning." She added, shyly: "I've been reading your Bible. I never did before, though I've heard bits of it, of course. It's an extraordinary book, and I can't say that I make much out of it as yet. But there's one place where it says—the words impressed me—'Love is of God; and whosoever loveth is born of God and knoweth God.' That strikes me as rather amazing—chiefly in the way it simplifies something we're accustomed to think of as difficult, if not impossible."

"You meant that by the mere process of loving we're in touch with God and know Him—when we're so likely to feel that He's unknowable and beyond our reach."

She nodded. "I told you once that the only thing I really knew about was love; but I've found that I knew very little. I hadn't imagined its height and its depth and its beauty. You've shown me that." She took his hand, smiling at him gently. "Don't you think that that's a great deal for a woman to say of a man? If she could never say any more—wouldn't it be much? But I *can* say more," she hastened on, not allowing him to speak. "I'm going to try to put that kind of love into practice—into practice, mind you!—toward every human being—just as you do. Oh!"—her voice failed a little, her eyes filled with tears, she bit her lip—"only when I do—and you don't understand what it is I'm attempting—I hope you'll be sure that—that it's that."

"But if it's that toward every human being, it will be that toward me, too, won't it, Florinda?"

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"Yes, toward you, too—toward you more than any one—in its way."

"But in what way?"

"In the way of a great gratitude and devotion." She laid her other hand on his. "Will you promise me to believe that?"

"But why should I promise you—when we're always going to be together?"

"Promise me, all the same."

"You know I can't but promise anything you ask."

"Thank you," she smiled. "I shall only ask you this; and this I shall beg you never to forget." She withdrew her hand from his, lying back with eyes closed. "I'm very tired," she murmured. "Would you mind saying good-by to me now—?"

"But, Clorinda, I've only come!"

"They won't let me talk long yet. Besides—I have to keep my strength for—for something I've got to do later in the day. I'll—I'll communicate—with you—soon again. In the mean while—kiss me—and go."

She was still lying with closed eyes when he raised himself from the long kiss on her lips, and stood up. "Clorinda," he said, hoarsely, as he looked down on her, "I'm afraid of you. I don't know what you mean—or what you intend to do—but I want you to know what *I* mean—and what *I* intend. I intend to marry you. I mean that nothing shall ever come between us. I've said solemnly—before witnesses—that I took you as my wife. You very nearly said that you took me as your husband. I'm coming back for the completion of that vow. I shall come to-morrow. Doctor Galloway will come with me—and we'll have the service here. It will give you no trouble. You needn't so much as stand up. But—I'm coming."

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She made neither movement nor response, still lying, pale and aerial and lovely, with closed eyes, and so, after stooping for one more long kiss, he turned and left her.

On descending the first flight of stairs he found Pansy Wilde waiting for him, near the door of the drawing-room.

"Mr. Bainbridge," she begged, timidly, "can I tell you something, sir?"

Though he was staggering along, with tears blinding him—he hardly knew for what—he endeavored to turn his mind to this new demand. "Certainly, Pansy. What is it?"

The girl blushed and grew conscious. "It's about—about Mr. Hindmarsh, sir."

"Isn't he kind to you?"

"Oh yes, sir; he's lovely. He's—he's asked me to—to marry him."

"Indeed?" The matter was now so grave that Bainbridge had no difficulty in giving it his attention. "But does he know—?"

"Yes, sir—I told him. He knows all about my being in jail—and the baby—and everything."

"And what has he said to that?"

"He's said that he knew it before—and that it's on account of it—partly—that he wants to—to take care of me—so that nothing won't happen to me again."

"And has Mrs. Gildersleeve said anything about it?"

She twisted her little person and hung her head. "She's said I was to be all the more sure that I was in love with him."

"And are you?"

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Pansy's bosom swelled. "I don't care whether I am or not. If he feels that way about me—"

He was searching for a clue to what was enigmatical in Clorinda. "And have you told that to Mrs. Gildersleeve, too?"

"Yes, sir; and she says I ought to be sure I know the difference between love and thankfulness."

"And—and does she say there's *much* difference?"

"She says there is—when it's any one like—like me. She says the kinder he is the more I ought to consider him; and that to marry him without loving him with all my heart 'd be the worst harm I could do him."

"But if he's in love with *you!*"

"That's what *I* say. But she says it 'd make it worse, because when a girl has once gone wrong, like—all she's got left to give is her undivided heart—that if she hasn't got that she hasn't got nothing—and if I was to turn him down he'd get over it and marry some one who'd be better for him in the end."

"And do you want me to advise you what to do?"

To his surprise Pansy said: "No, sir," quite conclusively, nodding her little head, sagely. "I'm going to take him. If I didn't—I might never get such a good chance again. Mrs. Gildersleeve says she won't put no obstacle in my way—only that if it was her—she'd give the man her very best—or else she wouldn't do him the harm of taking him at all."

Bainbridge was not sure of the meaning of Pansy's little sob, nor could he stop longer to inquire. He was thinking of the undivided heart, being sure that the expression was Clorinda's own. It was an additional incentive, if he needed any, for taking Doctor Galloway into his confidence and making those arrangements for

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the following day of which he had already announced his intention.

He was breakfasting on the next morning when he read the statement, thrown at haphazard into the news items of the day:

"Sir Malcolm and Lady Grant, who were married yesterday afternoon, left by the night train for Montreal, where they will take up their residence."

All the blood in Bainbridge's body seemed to rush back to his heart, leaving him with a sense of being stunned and suffocated at once. His immediate actions were purely mechanical. He laid the paper down; he sipped his coffee without tasting it. He felt sick and strange. Minutes passed before his mind could work sufficiently to tell him that the Lady Grant of the paragraph couldn't be Clorinda. Malcolm Grant had said in so many words that he had renounced her. He must have married some one else. Men did such things. They took refuge from an overpowering loneliness in any company they could find. Where a woman accepted her solitary lot, partly because she couldn't help herself, a man took second best or third best or even fourth best, rather than go with nothing at all. He could easily see how Malcolm Grant would have married an actress, or a chorus-girl, or any one, rather than return to Montreal alone.

He buoyed himself up with this hope while he hurried to the rectory and asked for Mary Galloway. She came into the shabby drawing-room at once, looking wan and white and wide-eyed, in a long, soft trailing thing of mauve. He read the truth before she had time to speak.

"So you've heard."

"Oh, but it isn't so!"

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"I'm afraid I must tell you that it is. She sent for me last evening—only an hour or so before they went to the train. It was all over then." She spoke as if it had been a death. "It—it happened in the afternoon."

He dashed his hand against his brow and cried out, "Oh, but how *could* she?"

They continued to stand, while she did her best to explain. "Clorinda wanted me to tell you that—that she did it because—because she couldn't help it. Everything made her—first because—oh, you *must* bear it!—because she'd always been in love with him—for years and years—only things happened that separated them—and there were misunderstandings—and she'd sworn never to marry him—never! . . . Only when she saw how near she came to marrying you—and doing you a great deal of harm—and spoiling your work—and your life—she sent for him and told him."

Thrusting his hands into his pockets, he panted between his clenched teeth, "Go on."

"She wanted you to understand that it was for your sake."

The mad impatience of the inarticulate sound he made kept it from being quite a groan.

"She knew she could never have been to you the wife you ought to have—that the people of St. Mary Magdalen's had been right—that everything was against it—things, so she said, that you knew about, but that I didn't understand—just as—just as everything was *for* the other thing." Her lip trembled and her eyes were full of compassion as she gazed up at him. "I could have told you—at any time during the past few months—that he was the man she—she really loved—loved that way, I mean—"

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He flung out his hands. "Then why didn't you?"

"Because you seemed to know it yourself. That evening—before you were to have been married—you practically said so."

"But don't you know that we all contradict ourselves? When I said that it was to have *you* contradict *me*."

"That's what I thought; only that it seemed to me—too late. I couldn't think of anything to do but let you go on—and put the best light on it possible." She tried to comfort him. "And, you know, it wasn't that she didn't care about you. She did—only *not* in that way. There *are* two ways—and one way—"

"Makes people marry," he declared, with a kind of savagery, "while the other turns marriage into a sacrilege."

"Yes, that's it. You do understand. You remember my telling you that she once said you were—were too much like God. Well, that was just her way of putting it. You'd helped her wonderfully—in things I don't know anything about—and she felt such gratitude toward you that she didn't know it from love. She thought she *ought* to marry you, if you wanted to marry her. She said that she couldn't *see*—especially with the other thing—the real thing—of *that* kind—so mixed up and entangled—and with her own hard feeling toward Malcolm Grant—which was really a phase of love—about something she's never told me. . . . And then—when she was actually in the church that day—with a lot of things clear to her that had been dark before that—she said it was like the lifting of a veil!— Well, you know what happened—and the poor thing couldn't help it."

He dropped into a chair. With arms folded on a table, he stared with head erect into the distance, seeing nothing, his lips compressed. Timidly she drew near him,

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standing partly behind him, and summoning all her courage to say:

"I think that's all there is to tell you. You do understand." The affirmative nod of his head encouraged her to go on. "You—you understand everything, and so I needn't say how hard this has been for me—" As he raised his head to fling her a backward look she drew a little more behind him, leaning over his shoulder to lay something on the table in front of him. "She asked me to give you this."

For long minutes he leaned on his folded arms, gazing at the envelope on which his own name was written, but making no effort to open it. When he did so it was slowly, and as if in a dream.

There was no formal beginning and no signature. It reminded him of the writing Malcolm Grant had brought to him two years before.

This is the time when I want you to remember that I am doing everything for love—as you taught me. You may not think I am acting wisely or kindly, but you will. I couldn't do it more gently, so as to give you less surprise and pain, because you would never have permitted it. Believe me, I am taking the only way, the way that will be best in the end for us all. You will live to see that; and if I make you suffer now, the day will come when you will know how right I am—and forgive me. When it does, perhaps you will be able to send me some word that you have not been rendered wholly unhappy in knowing me—since I have been so blessed and so strengthened in knowing you.

Mary will tell you everything else. She will always be able to give you news of me. Ask her sometimes. She will give me news of you, too. We shall not be altogether separated so long as we have her as a bond between us. It was through her that we knew each other—do you remember?—and I hope she will always be there.

I am keeping your ring. Keep mine.

THE LIFTED VEIL

He read this with little apparent emotion, and, folding the sheet, he slipped it back into the envelope, which he put into his breast pocket, as if it was some ordinary note. Looking round to speak to Mary Galloway, he found she had left him alone.

Once more he leaned on the table with folded arms and stared. It was one of those periods, of which he had known others, when he seemed neither to suffer nor to think. He had a return of that sensation which he had experienced once or twice before, of being on a ship that was going down. Everything seemed to be sinking.

A half-hour later he made his way to the rector's study.

"My trip to France seems to have become obvious," he said, with what composure he could command, "and I suppose I may be off."

The old man laid down the morning paper to discuss the practical bearings of this request. He did it coolly, without appearing to notice the reddened eyes or the twitching lips of the drawn, haggard face before him. It was only when all was arranged that Bainbridge, having risen to go away, blurted out the question, "What's the good of those happenings in life which give us a great deal of joy, or a great deal of sorrow, or a great deal of both together, and pass—apparently with no reason why they should ever have begun?"

The rector again laid down the paper he had taken up, removed his glasses, and rubbed them with his handkerchief, after which he blew his nose.

"Have you never thought, when you've been crossing the Atlantic, how seemingly useless is the billow that rises—that rises only to fall—that falls only to rise in another billow—and so on, endlessly over the ocean?"

Bainbridge confessed to some such observation.

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"But no one wave is a creation by itself. Each springs from another—from a great many others—from myriads and myriads of others, back to the beginning of time. Its causes may be lost to such poor ken as ours in the infinity of the seas—and yet they're all there, definite, numbered, and recorded by the intelligence in which even a breaker can't form and dissolve unperceived."

Again Bainbridge made a sign that he followed comprehendingly.

The roll of the deep voice suggested a Buddha speaking from some age-long seat of meditation. "And yet you know that each of these waves, as your steamer rides it, brings you nearer to your object, nearer to your port. Very well, then! Just so with the phenomena of life. Nothing comes by itself—however isolated or disconnected it may seem. The causes are all there—ininitely far back. The thing that happens, no matter how you may question it or wonder at it, is the thing that was more or less bound to happen. It's the billow that rises for the minute. What's important is not to know whence it came, but how to rise on it. You can let it swamp your little craft—or you can make it one more bounding leap on the voyage which is to take you home."

Bainbridge said nothing, but he stood with bowed head and reflected. He knew it was in substance what he would have said to another man; and yet it was so hard for the physician to heal himself!

And because it was hard it was not till a fortnight later, on the eve of his sailing, that he was able to write:

You want me to tell you that I have not been made wholly unhappy in knowing you. Please be assured that knowing you has been the most precious experience of my life. Whatever happens, nothing can ever dim the wonder of the past few months

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or make me less grateful for the joy—I can use the word—it has brought me. If I have lost some things, I have gained too much not to be able to see that your friendship has made me rich with an inner treasure that time will not diminish.

I shall ask Mary for news of you. She will give you news of me.

I am keeping the ring—where I have always kept it.

“Have you heard from her?” he asked Mary Galloway, when he had brought her this message to transmit.

She nodded—chiefly because she found it hard to speak.

“And she’s—?”

“She’s better in health—and—and happy—except—except about you.”

He took one or two turns up and down the old rectory drawing-room before he was able to say, “Then tell her to be happy about me, too.” He stood before her now, looking down on her as she sat with eyes lowered and nervously clasped hands. “Tell her that—that if a veil has been lifted for her—one has been lifted for me also—one that was down—close down—and that I see—”

When he was long silent she gathered all her strength together to say, “See—what?”

“I see what I’ve written her, for one thing—and I see what she’s written me—be sure to tell her that!—and I also see—” his voice dropped, as he added: “but I’ll write that—or we’ll talk it over when I come back. Now—good-by.”

She barely lifted her brimming eyes, as without rising, and with her hand resting in his, she stammered the words, “Then you—you mean to write?”

“I will—if you’ll write to me.”

But as she made no answer to that proposal he stooped, kissed her cold hand, and turned away.

THE LIFTED VEIL

Out at sea he read the words, in a periodical he found in the smoking-room, and of which he knew the cover. "The marriage arranged between Mr. Bainbridge, the assistant rector of St. Mary Magdalen's, Fifth Avenue, and Mrs. Martin Gildersleeve (Clorinda Rintoul) will not take place."

Somehow, in this laconic notice, worded after the most correct models of its kind, he divined once more Miss Higgins's change of heart.

He was more sure of it, however, in the flattering article on Clorinda which he found in another column, an article describing the handsome residence of the new Lady Grant in Sherbrooke Street, with an account of the remarkable collection of miniatures formed by the first baronet, also a Sir Malcolm Grant—and the prophecy, founded on the Lord only knew what intuition of Miss Higgins's own, that in recognition of his splendid services and heroic financial sacrifices in the patriotic cause the present Sir Malcolm Grant would soon be made a peer.

THE END

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