

THE FRUIT OF THE TREE

BY EDITH WHARTON

ILLUSTRATION BY ALONZO KIMBALL

(BOOK IV.—Concluded)

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MR. LANGHOPE, tossing down a note on Mrs. Ansell's drawing-room table, commanded imperiously: "Read that!"

She set aside her tea-cup, and looked up, not at the note, but into his face, which was traversed by one of the waves of heat and tremulousness that she was beginning to dread for him. Mr. Langhope had changed greatly in the last three months; and as he stood before her in the clear light of the June afternoon it came to her that he had at last suffered the sudden collapse which is the penalty of youth preserved beyond its time.

"What is it?" she asked, still watching him as she put out her hand for the letter.

"Amherst writes to remind me of my promise to take Cicely to Hanaford next week, for her birthday."

"Well—it was a promise, wasn't it?" she rejoined, running her eyes over the page.

"A promise—yes; but made before . . . Read the note—you'll see there's no reference to his wife. For all I know, she'll be there to receive us."

"But that was a promise too."

"That neither Cicely nor I should ever set eyes on her? Yes. But why should she keep it? I was a fool that day—she fooled me as she's fooled us all! But you saw through it from the beginning—you said at once that she'd never leave him."

Mrs. Ansell reflected. "I said that before I knew all the circumstances. Now I think differently."

"You think she still means to go?"

She handed the letter back to him. "I think this is to tell you so."

"This?" He groped for his glasses, dubiously scanning the letter again.

"Yes. And what's more, if you refuse

to go she'll have every right to break her side of the agreement."

Mr. Langhope sank into a chair, steadying himself painfully with his stick. "Upon my soul, I sometimes think you're on her side!" he ejaculated.

"No—but I like fair play," she returned, measuring his tea carefully into his favourite little porcelain tea-pot.

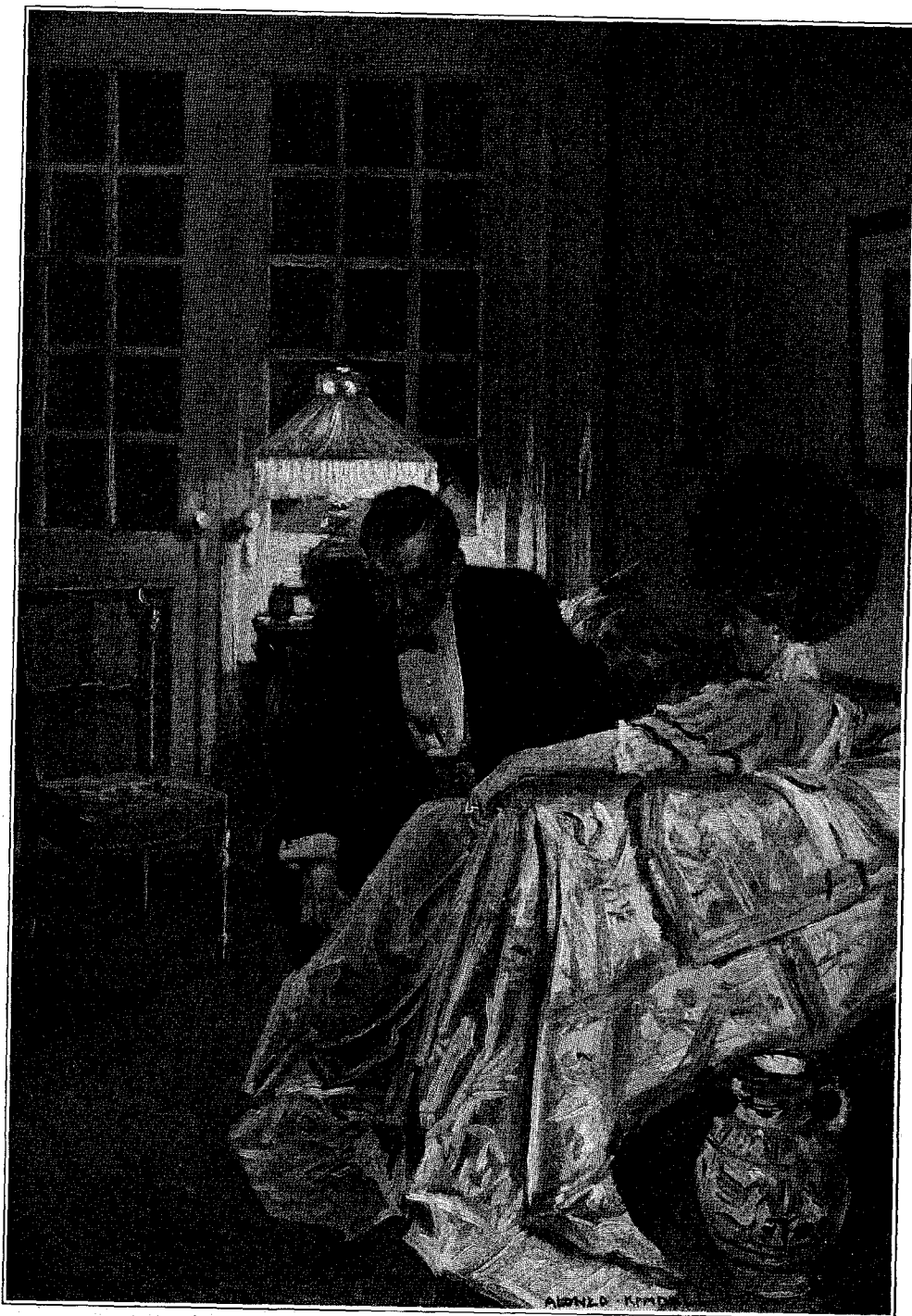
"Fair play?"

"She's offering to do her part. It's for you to do yours now—to take Cicely to Hanaford."

"If I find her there, I never cross Amherst's threshold again!"

Mrs. Ansell, without answering, rose and put his tea-cup on the slender-legged table at his elbow; then, before returning to her seat, she found the enamelled match-box and laid it by the cup. It was becoming difficult for Mr. Langhope to guide his movements about her small encumbered room; and he had always liked being waited on.

Mrs. Ansell's prognostication proved correct. When Mr. Langhope and Cicely arrived at Hanaford they found Amherst alone to receive them. He explained briefly that his wife had been unwell, and had gone to seek rest and change at the house of an old friend in the West. Mr. Langhope expressed a decent amount of regret, and the subject was dropped as if by common consent. Cicely, however, was not so easily silenced. Poor Bessy's uncertain fits of tenderness had produced more bewilderment than pleasure in her sober-minded child; but the little girl's feelings and perceptions had developed rapidly in the equable atmosphere of her step-mother's affection. Cicely had reached the age when children put their questions with as much ingenuity as persistence, and both Mr. Langhope and Amherst longed for Mrs. Ansell's aid in parrying her incessant interrogations as to the cause and length of Justine's absence,



Drawn by Alonzo Kimball.

"And he asked this of my wife— . . . ?"—Page 603.

what she had said before going, and what promise she had made about coming back. But Mrs. Ansell had not come to Hanaford. Though it had become a matter of habit to include her in the family pilgrimages to the mills she had firmly maintained the plea of more urgent engagements; and the two men, with only Cicely between them, had spent the long days and longer evenings in unaccustomed and unmitigated proximity.

Mr. Langhope, before leaving, thought it proper to touch tentatively on his promise of giving Cicely to Amherst for the summer; but to his surprise the latter, after a brief moment of hesitation, replied that he should probably go to Europe for two or three months.

"To Europe? Alone?" escaped from Mr. Langhope before he had time to weigh his words.

Amherst frowned slightly. "I have been made a delegate to the Berne conference on the housing of factory operatives," he said at length, without making a direct reply to the question; "and if there is nothing to keep me at Westmore, I shall probably go out in July." He waited a moment, and then added: "My wife has decided to spend the summer in Michigan."

Mr. Langhope's answer was a vague murmur of assent, and Amherst turned the talk to other matters.

Mr. Langhope returned to town with distinct views on the situation at Hanaford.

"Poor devil—I'm sorry for him: he can hardly speak of her," he broke out at once to Mrs. Ansell, in the course of their first confidential hour together.

"Because he cares too much—he's too unhappy?" she conjectured.

"Because he loathes her!" Mr. Langhope brought out with emphasis.

Mrs. Ansell drew a deep sigh which made him add accusingly: "I believe you're actually sorry!"

"Sorry?" She raised her eye-brows with a slight smile. "Should one not always be sorry to know there's a little less love and a little more hate in the world?"

"You'll be asking *me* not to hate her next!"

She still continued to smile on him. "It's the haters, not the hated, I'm sorry for," she said at length; and he broke out in re-

ply: "Oh, don't let's talk of her. I sometimes feel she takes up more place in our lives than when she was with us!"

Amherst went to the Berne conference in July, and spent six weeks afterward in rapid visits to various industrial centres and model factory villages. During his previous European pilgrimages his interest had by no means been restricted to sociological questions: the appeal of an old civilization, reaching him through its innumerable forms of tradition and beauty, had roused that side of his imagination which his work at home left untouched. But upon his present state of deep moral commotion the spells of art and history were powerless to work. The foundations of his life had been shaken, and the fair exterior of the world was as vacant as a maniac's face. He could only take refuge in his special task, barricading himself against every expression of beauty and poetry as so many poignant reminders of a phase of life that he was vainly trying to cast off and forget.

Even his work had been embittered to him, thrust out of its place in the ordered scheme of things. It had cost him a hard struggle to hold fast to his main purpose, to convince himself that his real duty lay, not in renouncing the Westmore money and its obligations, but in carrying out his projected task as if nothing had occurred to affect his personal relation to it. The mere fact that such a renunciation would have been a deliberate moral suicide, a severing once for all of every artery of action, made it take on, at first; the semblance of an obligation, a sort of higher duty to the abstract conception of what he owed himself. But Justine had not erred in her forecast. Once she had passed out of his life, it was easier for him to return to a dispassionate view of his situation, to see, and boldly confess to himself that he saw, the still higher duty of sticking to his task, instead of sacrificing it to any ideal of personal disinterestedness. It was this gradual process of adjustment that saved him from the desolating scepticism which falls on the active man when the sources of his activity are tainted. Having accepted his fate, having consented to see in himself merely the necessary agent of a good to be done, he could escape from self-questioning only by shutting himself

up in the practical exigencies of his work, closing his eyes and his thoughts to everything which had formerly related it to a wider world, had given meaning and beauty to life as a whole.

The return from Europe, and the taking up of the daily routine at Hanaford, were the most difficult phases in this process of moral adaptation.

Justine's departure had at first brought relief. He had been too sincere with himself to oppose her wish to leave Hanaford for a time, since he believed that, for her as well as for himself, a temporary separation would be less painful than a continuance of their actual relation. But as the weeks passed into months he found he was no nearer to a clear view of his own case: the future was still dark and enigmatic. Justine's desire to leave him had revived his unformulated distrust of her. What could it mean, but that there were thoughts within her which could not be at rest in his presence? He had given her every proof of his wish to forget the past, and Mr. Langhope had behaved with unequalled magnanimity. Yet Justine's unhappiness was evident: she could not conceal her longing to escape from the conditions her act had created. Was it because, in reality, she was conscious of other motives than the one she acknowledged? She had insisted, almost unfeelingly as it might have seemed, on the abstract rightness of what she had done, on the fact that, ideally speaking, her act could not be made less right, less justifiable, by the special accidental consequences that had flowed from it. Because these consequences had caught her in a web of tragic fatality she would not be guilty of the weakness of tracing back the disaster to any intrinsic error in her original motive. Why, then, if this was her real, her proud attitude toward the past—and since those about her believed in her sincerity, and accepted her justification as valid from her point of view if not from theirs—why had she not been able to maintain her posture, to carry on life on the terms she had exacted from others?

A special circumstance contributed to this feeling of distrust; the fact, namely, that Justine, a week after her departure from Hanaford, had written to say that she could not, from that moment till her return, consent to accept any money from Amherst.

As her manner was, she put her reasons clearly and soberly, without evasion or ambiguity.

"Since you and I," she wrote, "have always agreed in regarding the Westmore money as a kind of wage for our services at the mills, I cannot be satisfied to go on drawing that wage while I am unable to do any work in return. I am sure you must feel as I do about this; and you need have no anxiety as to the practical side of the question, since I have enough to live on in some savings from my hospital days, which were invested for me two years ago by Harry Dressel, and are beginning to bring in a small return. This being the case, I feel I can afford to interpret in any way I choose the terms of the bargain between myself and Westmore."

On reading this, Amherst's mind had gone through the strange dual process which now marked all his judgments of his wife. At first he had fancied he understood her, and had felt that he should have done as she did; then the usual reaction of distrust set in, and he asked himself why she, who had so little of the conventional attitude toward money, should now develop this unexpected susceptibility. And so the old question presented itself in another shape: if she had nothing to reproach herself for, why was it intolerable to her to live on Bessy's money? The fact that she was doing no actual service at Westmore did not account for her scruples—she would have been the last person to think that a sick servant should be docked of his pay. Her reluctance could come only from that hidden cause of compunction which had prompted her departure, and which now forced her to sever even the merely material links between herself and her past.

Amherst, on his return to Hanaford, had tried to find in these considerations a reason for his deep unrest. It was his wife's course which still cast a torturing doubt on what he had braced his will to accept and put behind him. And he now told himself that the perpetual galling sense of her absence was due to this uneasy consciousness of what it meant, of the dark secrets it enveloped and held back from him. In actual truth, every particle of his being missed her, he lacked her at every turn. She had been at once the partner of his task, and the *pays bleu* into which he escaped from it;

the vivifying thought which gave meaning to the life he had chosen, yet never let him forget that there was a larger richer life outside, to which he was rooted by deeper and more intrinsic things than any abstract ideal of altruism. His love had preserved his identity, saved him from shrinking into the mere nameless unit which the social enthusiast is in danger of becoming unless the humanitarian passion is balanced, and a little overweighed, by a merely human one. And now this equilibrium was lost forever, and his deepest pain lay in realizing that he could not regain it, even by casting off Westmore and choosing the narrower but richer individual existence that her love might once have offered. His life was in truth one indivisible organism, not two halves artificially united. Self and other-self were ingrown from the roots—which ever portion fate restricted him to would be but a bleeding half-live fragment of the mutilated whole.

Happily for him, chance made this crisis of his life coincide with a strike at Westmore. Soon after his return to Hanaford he found himself compelled to grapple with the hardest problem of his industrial career, and he was carried through the ensuing three months by that tide of swift obligatory action that sweeps the ship-wrecked spirit over so many sunken reefs of fear and despair. The knowledge that he was better able to deal with the question than any one who might conceivably have taken his place—this conviction, which was presently confirmed by the peaceable adjustment of the strike, helped to make the sense of his immediate usefulness outbalance that other, disintegrating doubt as to the final value of such efforts. And so he tried to settle down into a kind of mechanical altruism, in which the reflexes of habit should take the place of that daily renewal of faith and enthusiasm which had been fed from the springs of his own joy.

The autumn came and passed into winter; and after Mr. Langhope's re-establishment in town Amherst began to resume his usual visits to his step-daughter.

His natural affection for the little girl had been deepened by the unforeseen manner in which her fate had been entrusted to him. The thought of Bessy, softened to compunction by the discovery that her love

had persisted under their apparently hopeless estrangement—this feeling, intensified to the verge of morbidness by the circumstances attending her death, now sought expression in a passionate devotion to her child. Accident had, in short, created between Bessy and himself a retrospective sympathy which the resumption of life together would have dispelled in a week—one of the exhalations from the past that depress the vitality of those who linger too near the grave of dead experiences.

Since Justine's departure Amherst had felt himself still more drawn to Cicely; but his relation to the child was complicated by the fact that she would not be satisfied as to the cause of her stepmother's absence. Whenever Amherst came to town, her first question was for Justine; and her memory had the precocious persistence sometimes developed in children too early deprived of their natural atmosphere of affection. Cicely had always been petted and adored, at odd times and by divers people; but some instinct seemed to tell her that, of all the tenderness bestowed on her, Justine's most resembled the all-pervading motherly element in which the child's heart expands without ever being conscious of its needs.

If it had been embarrassing to evade Cicely's questions in June it became doubly so as the months passed, and the pretext of Justine's ill-health grew more and more difficult to sustain. And in the following March Amherst was suddenly called from Hanaford by the news that the little girl herself was ill. Serious complications had developed from a protracted case of scarlet fever, and for two weeks the child's fate was uncertain. Then she began to recover, and in the joy of seeing life come back to her, Mr. Langhope and Amherst felt as though they must not only gratify every wish she expressed, but try to guess at those they saw floating below the surface of her clear vague eyes.

It was noticeable to Mrs. Ansell, if not to the others, that one of these unexpressed wishes was the desire to see her step-mother. Cicely no longer asked for Justine; but something in her silence, or in the gesture with which she gently put from her other offers of diversion and companionship, suddenly struck Mrs. Ansell as more poignant than speech.

"What is it the child wants?" she asked

the governess, in the course of one of their whispered consultations; and the governess, after a moment's hesitation, replied: "She said something about a letter she wrote to Mrs. Amherst just before she was taken ill—about having had no answer, I think."

"Ah—she writes to Mrs. Amherst, does she?"

The governess, evidently aware that she trod on delicate ground, tried at once to defend herself and her pupil.

"It was my fault, perhaps. I suggested once that her little compositions should take the form of letters—it usually interests a child more—and she asked if they might be written to Mrs. Amherst."

"Your fault? Why should not the child write to her step-mother?" Mrs. Ansell rejoined with studied surprise; and on the other's murmuring: "Of course—of course——" she added haughtily: "I trust the letters were sent?"

The governess floundered. "I couldn't say—but perhaps the nurse. . ."

That evening Cicely was less well. There was a slight return of fever, and the doctor, hastily summoned, hinted at the possibility of too much excitement in the sick-room.

"Excitement? There has been no excitement," Mr. Langhope protested, quivering with the sudden renewal of fear.

"No? The child seemed nervous, uneasy. It's hard to say why, because she is unusually reserved for her age."

The medical man took his departure, and Mr. Langhope and Mrs. Ansell faced each other in the disarray produced by a call to arms when all has seemed at peace.

"I shall lose her—I shall lose her!" the grandfather broke out, sinking into his chair with a groan.

Mrs. Ansell, gathering her furs about her for departure, turned on him abruptly from the threshold.

"It's stupid, what you're doing—stupid!" she exclaimed with unwonted vehemence.

He raised his head with a startled look. "What do you mean—what I'm doing?"

"The child misses Justine. You ought to send for her."

Mr. Langhope's hands dropped to the arms of his chair, and he straightened himself up with a pale flash of indignation. "You've had moments lately——!"

"I've had moments, yes; and so have you—when the child came back to us, and we stood there and wondered how we could keep her, tie her fast . . . and in those moments I saw . . . saw what she wanted . . . and so did you!"

Mr. Langhope turned away his head. "You're a sentimentalist!" he flung scornfully back at her.

"Oh, call me any bad names you please!"

"I won't send for that woman!"

"No." She fastened her furs slowly, with the gentle deliberate movements that no emotion ever hastened or disturbed.

"Why do you say no?" he challenged her.

"To make you contradict me, perhaps," she ventured, after looking at him again for a moment.

"Ah——" He shifted his position, one elbow supporting his bowed head, his eyes fixed on the ground. Presently he brought out: "Could one ask her to come—and see the child—and go away again—for good?"

"To break the compact at your pleasure, and enter into it again for the same reason?"

"No—no—I see." He paused, and then looked up at her suddenly. "But what if Amherst won't have her back himself?"

"Shall I ask him?"

"I tell you he can't bear to hear her name!"

"But he doesn't know why she has left him."

Mr. Langhope gathered his brows in a frown. "Why—what on earth—what possible difference would that make?"

Mrs. Ansell, from the doorway, shed a pitying glance on him. "Ah—if you don't see!" she murmured.

He sank back into his seat with a groan. "Good heavens, Maria, how you torture me! I see enough as it is—I see too much of the cursed business!"

She paused again, and then slowly moved a step or two nearer, laying her hand on his shoulder.

"There's one thing you've never seen yet, Henry: what Bessy herself would do now—for the child—if she could."

He sat motionless under her light touch, his eyes on hers, till their inmost thoughts felt for and found each other, as they still sometimes could, through the fog of years and selfishness and worldly habit; then he

dropped his face into his hands, hiding it from her with the instinctive shrinking of an aged grief.

XLI

AMHERST, Cicely's convalescence once assured, had been obliged to go back to Hanaford; but some ten days later, on hearing from Mrs. Ansell that the little girl's progress was less rapid than had been hoped, he returned to his father-in-law's for a Sunday.

He came two days after the talk recorded in the last chapter—a talk of which Mrs. Ansell's letter to him had been the direct result. She had promised Mr. Langhope that, in writing to Amherst, she would not go beyond the briefest statement of fact; and she had kept her word, trusting to circumstances to speak for her.

Mrs. Ansell, during Cicely's illness, had formed the habit of dropping in to take tea with Mr. Langhope, instead of awaiting him at five in her own drawing-room; and on the Sunday in question she found him alone. Beneath his pleasure in seeing her, which had grown more marked as his dependence on her increased, she at once discerned traces of recent disturbance; and her first question was for Cicely.

He met it with a discouraged gesture. "No great change—Amherst finds her looking less well than when he was here before."

"He's upstairs with her?"

"Yes—she seems to want him."

Mrs. Ansell seated herself in silence behind the tea-tray, of which she was now recognized as the officiating priestess. As she drew off her long gloves, and mechanically straightened the row of delicate old cups, Mr. Langhope added with an effort: "I've spoken to him—told him what you said."

She looked up quickly.

"About the child's wish," he continued to explain. "About her having written to his wife. It seems her last letters have not been answered."

He paused, and Mrs. Ansell, with her usual calm precision, proceeded to measure the tea into the fluted Georgian tea-pot. She could be as reticent in approval as in reprehension, and not for the world would she have seemed to claim any share in the

turn that events appeared to be taking. She even preferred the risk of leaving her old friend to add half-reproachfully: "I told Amherst what you and the nurse thought."

"Yes?"

"That Cicely pines for his wife. I put it to him in black and white." The words came out on a deep strained breath; and Mrs. Ansell faltered: "Well?"

"Well—he doesn't know where she is himself."

"Doesn't *know*?"

"They're separated—utterly separated. It's as I told you: he could hardly name her."

Mrs. Ansell had unconsciously ceased her ministrations, letting her hands fall on her knee while she brooded in blank wonder on her companion's face.

"I wonder what reason she could have given him?" she murmured at length.

"For going? He loathes her, I tell you!"

"Yes—but *how did she make him?*"

He struck his hand violently on the arm of his chair. "Upon my soul, you seem to forget!"

"No." She shook her head with a half smile. "I simply remember more than you do."

"What more?" he began, with a flush of anger; but she raised a quieting hand.

"What does all that matter—if, now that we need her, we can't get her?"

He made no answer, and she returned to the dispensing of his tea; but as she rose to put the cup in his hand he asked, half querulously: "You think it's going to be very bad for the child, then?"

Mrs. Ansell smiled with the thin edge of her lips. "One can hardly set the police after her——!"

"No; we're powerless," he groaned in assent.

As the cup passed between them she dropped her eyes to his with a quick flash of interrogation; but he sat staring moodily before him, and she moved back to the sofa without a word.

On the way downstairs she met Amherst descending from Cicely's room.

Since the early days of his first marriage there had always been, on Amherst's side, a sense of obscure antagonism toward Mrs. Ansell. She was almost the embodied spirit

of the world he dreaded and disliked: her serenity, her tolerance, her adaptability, seemed to smile away and disintegrate all the high enthusiasms, the stubborn convictions, that he had tried to plant in the shifting sands of his married life. And now that Bessy's death had given her back the attributes with which his fancy had originally invested her, he had come to regard Mrs. Ansell as the evil influence that had come between himself and his wife.

Mrs. Ansell was probably not unaware of the successive transitions of feeling which had led up to this unflattering view; but her life had been passed among petty rivalries and animosities, and she had the patience and adroitness of the spy in a hostile camp.

She and Amherst exchanged a few words about Cicely; then she exclaimed, with a glance through the glass panes of the hall door: "But I must be off—I'm on foot, and the crossings appal me after dark."

He could do no less, at that, than offer to guide her across Fifth Avenue; and still talking of Cicely, she led him down the thronged thoroughfare till her own corner was reached, and then her own door; turning there to ask, as if by an afterthought: "Won't you come up? There's one thing more I want to say."

A shade of reluctance crossed his face, which, as the vestibule light fell on it, looked hard and tired, like a face set obstinately against a winter gale; but he murmured a word of assent, and followed her into the shining steel cage of the lift.

In her little drawing-room, among the shaded lamps and bowls of spring flowers, she pushed a chair forward, settled herself in her usual corner of the sofa, and said with a directness that seemed an echo of his own tone: "I asked you to come up because I want to talk to you about Mr. Langhope."

Amherst looked at her in surprise. Though his father-in-law's health had been more or less unsatisfactory for the last year, all their concern, of late, had been for Cicely.

"You think him less well?" he enquired.

She waited to draw off and smooth her gloves, with one of the deliberate gestures that served to shade and supplement her speech.

"I think him extremely unhappy."

Amherst moved uneasily in his seat.

He did not know where she meant the talk to lead them, but he guessed that it would be over painful places, and he saw no reason why he should be forced to follow her.

"You mean that he's still anxious about Cicely?"

"Partly that—yes." She paused. "The child will get well, no doubt; but she is very lonely. She needs youth, heat, light. Mr. Langhope can't give her those, or even a semblance of them; and it's an art I've lost the secret of," she added with her shadowy smile.

Amherst's brows darkened. "I realize all she has lost——"

Mrs. Ansell glanced up at him quickly. "She is twice motherless," she said.

The blood rose to his neck and temples, and he tightened his hand on the arm of his chair. But it was a part of Mrs. Ansell's expertness to know when such danger signals must be heeded and when they might be ignored, and she went on quietly: "It's the question of the future that is troubling Mr. Langhope. After such an illness, the next months of Cicely's life should be all happiness. And money won't buy the kind she needs: one can't pick out the right companion for such a child as one can match a ribbon. What she wants is spontaneous affection, not the most superlative manufactured article. She wants the sort of love that Justine gave her."

It was the first time in months that Amherst had heard his wife's name spoken outside of his own house. No one but his mother mentioned Justine to him now; and of late even his mother had dropped her enquiries and allusions, prudently acquiescing in the habit of silence which his own silence had created about him. To hear the name again—the two little syllables which had been the key of life to him, and now shook him as the turning of a rusted lock shakes a long-closed door—to hear her name spoken familiarly, affectionately, as one speaks of some one who may come into the room the next moment—gave him a shock that was half pain, and half furtive unacknowledged joy. Men whose conscious thoughts are mostly projected outward, on the world of external activities, may be more moved by such a touch on the feelings than those who are perpetually testing and tuning their emotional chords. Amherst had foreseen from the first that

Mrs. Ansell might mean to speak of his wife; but though he had intended, if she did so, to cut their talk short, he now felt himself irresistibly constrained to hear her out.

Mrs. Ansell, having sped her shaft, followed its flight through lowered lashes, and saw that it had struck a vulnerable point; but she was far from assuming that the day was won.

"I believe," she continued, "that Mr. Langhope has said something of this to you already, and my only excuse for speaking is that I understood he had not been successful in his appeal."

No one but Mrs. Ansell—and perhaps she knew it—could have pushed so far beyond the conventional limits of discretion without seeming to overstep them by a hair; and she had often said, when pressed for the secret of her art, that it consisted simply in knowing the pass-word. That word once spoken, she might have added, the next secret was to give the enemy no time for resistance; and though she saw the frown reappear between Amherst's eyes, she went on, without heeding it: "I entreat you, Mr. Amherst, to let Cicely see your wife."

He reddened again, and pushed back his chair, as if to rise.

"No—don't break off like that! Let me say a word more. I know your answer to Mr. Langhope—that you and Justine are no longer together. But I thought of you as a man to sink your personal relations at such a moment as this."

"To sink them?" he repeated vaguely: and she went on: "After all, what difference does it make?"

"What difference?" He stared in unmitigated wonder, and then answered, with a touch of irony: "It might at least make the difference of my being unwilling to ask a favour of her."

Mrs. Ansell, at this, raised her eyes and let them rest full on his. "Because she has done you so great a one already?"

He stared again, sinking back automatically into his chair. "I don't understand you."

"No." She smiled a little, as if to give herself time. "But I mean that you shall. If I were a man I suppose I couldn't, because a man's code of honour is such a clumsy cast-iron thing. But a woman's, luckily, can be cut over—if she's clever—to fit any new occasion; and in this case I

should be willing to reduce mine to tatters if necessary."

Amherst's look of bewilderment deepened. "What is it that I don't understand?" he asked at length, in a low voice.

"Well—first of all, why Mr. Langhope had the right to ask you to send for your wife."

"The right?"

"You don't recognize such a right on his part?"

"No—why should I?"

"Supposing she had left you by his wish?"

"His wish? *His*—?"

He was on his feet now, gazing at her blindly, while the solid world seemed to grow thin about him. Her next words reduced it to a mist.

"My poor Amherst—why else, on earth, should she have left you?"

She brought it out clearly, in her small chiming tones; and as the sound travelled toward him it seemed to gather momentum, till her words rang through his brain as if every incomprehensible incident in the past had suddenly boomed forth the question. Why else, indeed, should she have left him? He stood motionless for a while; then he approached Mrs. Ansell and said: "Tell me."

She drew farther back into her corner of the sofa, waving him to a seat beside her, as though to bring his inquisitory eyes on a level where her own could command them; but he stood where he was, unconscious of her gesture, and merely repeating: "Tell me."

She may have said to herself that a woman would have needed no farther telling; but to him she only replied, slanting her head up to his: "To spare you and himself pain—to keep everything, between himself and you, as it had been before you married her."

He dropped down beside her at that, grasping the back of the sofa as if he wanted something to clutch and throttle. The veins swelled in his temples, and as he pushed back his tossed hair Mrs. Ansell noticed for the first time how gray it had grown on the under side.

"And he asked this of my wife—he accepted it?"

"Haven't *you* accepted it?"

"I? How could I guess her reasons—how could I imagine——?"

Mrs. Ansell raised her brows a hair's breadth at that. "I don't know. But as a fact, he didn't ask—it was she who offered, who forced it on him, even!"

"Forced her going on him?"

"In a sense, yes; by making it appear that *you* felt as he did about—about poor Bessy's death: that the thought of what had happened at that time was as abhorrent to you as to him—that *she* was as abhorrent to you. No doubt she foresaw that, had she permitted the least doubt on that point, there would have been no need of her leaving you, since the relation between yourself and Mr. Langhope would have been altered—destroyed. . ."

"Yes. I expected that—I warned her of it. But how did she make him think——?"

"How can I tell? To begin with, I don't know your real feeling. For all I know she was telling the truth—and Mr. Langhope of course thought she was."

"That I abhorred her? Oh——" he broke out, on his feet in an instant.

"Then why——?"

"Why did I let her leave me?" He strode across the room, as his habit was in moments of agitation, turning back to her again before he answered. "Because I *didn't* know—didn't know anything! And because her insisting on going away like that, without any explanation, made me feel . . . imagine there was . . . something she didn't *want* me to know . . . something she was afraid of not being able to hide from me if we stayed together any longer."

"Well—there was: the extent to which she loved you."

Mrs. Ansell, her hands clasped on her knee, her gaze holding his with a kind of visionary fixity, seemed to reconstruct the history of his past, bit by bit, with the words she was dragging out of him.

"I see it—I see it all now," she went on, with a repressed fervour that he had never divined in her. "It was the only solution for her, as well as for the rest of you. The more she showed her love, the more it would have cast a doubt on her motive . . . the greater distance she would have put between herself and you. And so she showed it in the only way that was safe for both of you, by taking herself away and hiding it in her heart; and before going, she secured your peace of mind, your future.

If she ruined anything, she rebuilt the ruin. Oh, she paid—she paid in full!"

Justine had paid, yes—paid to the utmost limit of whatever debt toward society she had contracted by overstepping its laws. And her resolve to discharge the debt had been taken in a flash, as soon as she had seen that man can commit no act alone, whether for good or evil. The extent to which Amherst's fate was involved in hers had become clear to her with his first word of reassurance, of faith in her motive. And instantly a plan for releasing him had leapt full-formed into her mind, and had been carried out with swift unflinching resolution. As he forced himself, now, to look down the suddenly illuminated past to the weeks which had elapsed between her visit to Mr. Langhope and her departure from Hanaford, he wondered not so much at her swiftness of resolve as at her firmness in carrying out her plan—and he saw, with a blinding flash of insight, that it was in her love for him that she had found her strength.

In all moments of strong mental tension he became totally unconscious of time and place, and he now remained silent so long, his hands clasped behind him, his eyes fixed on an indeterminate point in space, that Mrs. Ansell at length rose and laid a questioning touch on his arm.

"It's not true that you don't know where she is?"

His face contracted. "At this moment I don't. Lately she has preferred . . . not to write. . ."

"But surely you must know how to find her?"

He tossed back his hair with an energetic movement. "I should find her if I didn't know how!"

They stood confronted in a gaze of silent intensity, each penetrating farther into the mind of the other than would once have seemed possible to either one; then Amherst held out his hand abruptly. "Goodbye—and thank you," he said.

She detained him a moment. "We shall see you soon again—see you both?"

His face grew stern. "It's not to oblige Mr. Langhope that I am going to find my wife."

"Ah, now you are unjust to him!" she exclaimed.

"Don't let us speak of him!" he broke in.

"Why not? When it is from him the request comes—the entreaty—that everything in the past should be forgotten?"

"Yes—when it suits his convenience!"

"Do you imagine that—even judging him in that way—it has not cost him a struggle?"

"I can think only of what it has cost her!"

Mrs. Ansell drew a deep sighing breath. "Ah—but don't you see that she has gained her point, and that nothing else matters to her?"

"Gained her point? Not if, by that, you mean that things here can ever go back to the old state—that she and I can ever remain at Westmore after this!"

Mrs. Ansell dropped her eyes for a moment; then she lifted to him her sweet impenetrable face.

"Do you know what you have to do—both you and he? Exactly what she decides," she affirmed.

XLII

JUSTINE'S answer to her husband's letter bore a New York address; and the surprise of finding her in the same town with himself, and not half an hour's walk from the room in which he sat, was so great that it seemed to demand some sudden and violent outlet of physical movement.

He thrust the letter in his pocket; took up his hat, and leaving the house, strode up Fifth Avenue toward the Park in the early spring sunlight.

The news had taken five days to reach him, for in order to reestablish communication with his wife he had been obliged to write to Michigan, with the request that his letter should be forwarded. He had never supposed that Justine would be hard to find, or that she had purposely enveloped her movements in mystery. When she ceased to write he had simply concluded that, like himself, she felt the mockery of trying to keep up a sort of distant, semi-fraternal relation, marked by the occasional interchange of inexpressive letters. The inextricable mingling of thought and sensation which made the peculiar closeness of their union could never, to such direct and passionate natures, be replaced by the pretense of a temperate friendship. Feeling thus

himself and instinctively assuming the same feeling in his wife, Amherst had respected her silence, her wish to break definitely with their former life. She had written him, in the autumn, that she intended to leave Michigan for a few months, but that, in any emergency, a letter addressed to her friend's house would reach her; and he had taken this as meaning that, unless the emergency arose, she preferred that their correspondence should cease. Acquiescence was all the easier because it accorded with his own desire. It seemed to him, as he looked back, that the love he and Justine had felt for each other was like some rare organism which could maintain life only in its special element; and that element was neither passion nor sentiment, but truth. It was only on the heights that they could breathe.

Some men, in his place, even while accepting the inevitableness of the moral rupture, would have felt concerned for the material side of the case. But it was characteristic of Amherst that this did not trouble him. He took it for granted that his wife would return to her nursing. From the first he had felt certain that it would be intolerable to her to accept aid from him, and that she would choose rather to support herself by the exercise of her regular profession; and, aside from such motives, he, who had always turned to hard work as the surest refuge from personal misery, thought it quite natural that she should seek the same means of escape.

He had therefore not been surprised, on opening her letter that morning, to learn that she had taken up her hospital work; but in the amazement of finding her so near at hand he hardly grasped her explanation of the coincidence. There was something about a Buffalo patient suddenly ordered to New York for special treatment, and refusing to go in the charge of a new nurse—but these details made no impression on his mind, which had only room for the fact that chance had brought his wife near him at the very moment when his whole being yearned for her.

She wrote that, owing to her duties, she would be unable to see him till three that afternoon; and he had still six hours to consume before their meeting. But in spirit they had met already—they were one in an intensity of communion which, as he strode northward along the bright crowded thor-

oughfare, seemed to gather up the whole world into one throbbing point of life.

He had a boyish wish to keep the secret of his happiness to himself, not to let Mr. Langhope or Mrs. Ansell know of his meeting with Justine till it was over; and after twice measuring the length of the Park he turned in at one of the little wooden restaurants which were beginning to unshutter themselves in anticipation of spring custom. If only he could have seen Justine that morning! If he could have brought her there, and they could have sat opposite each other, in the bare empty room, with sparrows bustling and twittering in the lilacs against the open window! The room was ugly enough—but how she would have delighted in the delicate green of the near slopes, and the purplish haze of the woods beyond! She took a childish pleasure in such small adventures, and had the knack of giving a touch of magic to their most commonplace details. Amherst, as he finished his cold beef and indifferent eggs, found himself boyishly planning to bring her back there the next day. . .

Then, over the coffee, he re-read her letter.

The address she gave was that of a small private hospital, and she explained that she would have to receive him in the public parlour, which at that hour was open to other visitors. As the time approached, the thought that they might not be alone when they met became insufferable; and he determined, if he found any one else in possession of the parlour, to wait in the hall, and meet her as she came down the stairs.

He continued to elaborate this plan as he walked back slowly through the Park and down Fifth Avenue. He had timed himself to reach the hospital a little before three; but though it lacked five minutes to the hour when he entered the parlour, two women were already seated in one of its windows. They looked around as he came in, evidently as much annoyed by his appearance as he had been to find them there. The older of the two showed a sallow middle-aged face beneath a limp crape veil; the other was a slight tawdry creature, with nodding feathers, and innumerable chains and bracelets which she fingered ceaselessly as she talked.

They eyed Amherst resentfully, and then

turned away, continuing their talk in low murmurs, while he seated himself at the marble-topped table littered with torn magazines. Now and then the younger woman's voice rose in a shrill staccato, and a phrase or two floated over to him. "She'd simply worked herself to death—the nurse told me so. . . She expects to go home in another week, though how she's going to stand the *fatigue*—" and then, after an inaudible answer: "It's all *his* fault, and if I was her I wouldn't go back to him for anything!"

"Oh, Cora, he's real sorry now," the older woman protestingly murmured; but the other, unappeased, rejoined with ominously nodding plumes: "*You* see—if they do make it up, it'll never be the same between them!"

Amherst started up nervously, and as he did so the clock struck three, and he opened the door and passed out into the hall. It was paved with black and white marble; the walls were washed in a dull yellowish tint, and the prevalent odour of antiseptics was mingled with a stale smell of cooking. At the back rose a straight staircase carpeted with brass-bound India-rubber, like a ship's companion-way; and down that staircase she would come in a moment—he fancied he heard her step now. . .

But the step was that of an elderly black-gowned woman in a cap—the matron probably.

She glanced at Amherst in surprise, and asked: "Are you waiting for some one?"

He made a motion of assent, and she opened the parlour door, saying: "Please walk in."

"May I not wait out here?" he urged.

She looked at him more attentively. "Why, no, I'm afraid not. You'll find the papers and magazines in here."

Mildly but firmly she drove him in before her, and closing the door, advanced to the two women in the window. Amherst's hopes leapt up: perhaps she had come to fetch the visitors upstairs! He strained his ears to catch what was being said, and while he was thus absorbed the door opened, and turning at the sound he found himself face to face with his wife.

He had not reflected that Justine would be in her nurse's dress; and the unexpected sight of the dark blue uniform and small

white cap, in which he had never seen her since their first meeting in the Hope Hospital, obliterated all bitter and unhappy memories, and gave him the illusion of passing back at once into the clear air of their early friendship. Then he looked at her and remembered.

He noticed that she had grown thinner than ever; or rather that her thinness, which had formerly had a healthy reed-like strength, now suggested fatigue and languor. And her face was spent, extinguished—the very eyes were lifeless. All her vitality seemed to have withdrawn itself into the arch of dense black hair which still clasped her forehead like the noble metal of some antique bust.

The sight stirred him with a deeper pity, a more vehement compunction; but the impulse to snatch her to him, and seek his pardon on her lips, was paralyzed by the sense that the three women in the window had stopped talking and turned their heads toward the door.

He held his hand out, and Justine's touched it for a moment; then he said in a low voice: "Is there no other place where I can see you?"

She made a negative gesture. "I am afraid not today."

Ah, her deep sweet voice—how completely his ear had lost the sound of it!

She looked doubtfully about the room, and pointed to a sofa at the end farthest from the windows.

"Shall we sit there?" she said.

He followed her in silence, and they sat down side by side. The matron had drawn up a chair and resumed her whispered conference with the women in the window. Between the two groups stretched the bare length of the room, broken only by a few arm-chairs of stained wood, and the marble-topped table covered with magazines.

The impossibility of giving free rein to his feelings developed in Amherst an unwonted intensity of perception, as though a sixth sense had suddenly emerged to take the place of those he could not use. And with this new-made faculty he seemed to gather up, and absorb into himself, as he had never done in their hours of closest communion, every detail of his wife's person, of her face and hands and gestures. He noticed how her full upper lids, of the tint of

yellowish ivory, had a slight bluish discoloration, and how little thread-like blue veins ran across her temples to the roots of her hair. The emaciation of her face, and the hollow shades beneath her cheek-bones, made her mouth seem redder and fuller, though a little line on each side, where it joined the cheek, gave it a tragic droop. And her hands! When her fingers met his he recalled having once picked up, in the winter woods, the little feather-light skeleton of a frozen bird—and that was what her touch was like.

And it was he who had brought her to this by his cruelty, his obtuseness, his base readiness to believe the worst of her! He did not want to pour himself out in self-accusation—that seemed too easy a way of escape. He wanted simply to take her in his arms, to ask her to give him one more chance—and then to show her! And all the while he was paralyzed by the group in the window.

"Can't we go out? I must speak to you," he began again nervously.

"Not this afternoon—the doctor is coming. Tomorrow——"

"I can't wait for tomorrow!"

She made a faint, imperceptible gesture, which read to his eyes: "You've waited a whole year."

"Yes, I know," he returned, still constrained by the necessity of muffling his voice, of perpetually measuring the distance between themselves and the window.

"I know what you might say—don't you suppose I've said it to myself a million times? But I didn't know—I couldn't imagine——"

She interrupted him with a rapid movement. "What do you know now?"

"What you promised Langhope——"

She turned her startled eyes on him, and he saw the blood run flame-like under her skin. "But *he* promised not to speak!" she cried.

"He hasn't—to me. But such things make themselves known. Should you have been content to go on in that way forever?"

She raised her head and her eyes rested in his. "If you were," she answered simply.

"Justine!"

Again she checked him with a silencing motion. "Please tell me just what has happened."

"Not now—there's too much else to say.

And nothing matters except that I'm with you."

"But Mr. Langhope——"

"He asks you to come. You're to see Cicely tomorrow."

Her lower lip trembled a little, and a tear flowed over and hung on her lashes.

"But what does all that matter now? We're together after this horrible year," he insisted.

She looked at him again. "But what is really changed?"

"Everything—everything! Not changed, I mean—just gone back."

"To where . . . we were . . . before?" she whispered; and he whispered back: "To where we were before."

There was a scraping of chairs on the floor, and with a sense of release Amherst saw that the colloquy in the window was over.

The two visitors, gathering their wraps about them, moved slowly across the room, still talking to the matron in excited undertones, through which, as they neared the threshold, the younger woman's staccato again broke out.

"I tell you, if she does go back to him, it'll never be the same between them!"

"Oh, Cora, I wouldn't say that," the other ineffectually wailed; then they moved toward the door, and a moment later it had closed on them.

Amherst turned to his wife with outstretched arms. "Say you forgive me, Justine!"

She held back a little from his entreating hands, not reproachfully, but as if with a last scruple for himself.

"There's nothing left . . . of the horror?" she asked below her breath.

"To be without you—that's the only horror!"

"You're *sure*——?"

"Sure!"

"It's just the same to you . . . just as it was . . . before?"

"Just the same, Justine!"

"It's not for myself, but you."

"Then, for me—never speak of it!" he implored.

"Because it's *not* the same, then?" leapt from her.

"Because it's wiped out—because it's never been!"

"Never?"

"Never!"

He felt her yield to him at that, and under his eyes, close under his lips, was her face at last. But as they kissed they heard the handle of the door turn, and drew apart quickly, her hand lingering in his under the fold of her dress.

A nurse looked in, dressed in the white uniform and pointed cap of the hospital. Amherst fancied that she smiled a little as she saw them.

"Miss Brent—the doctor wants you to come right up and give the morphine."

The door shut again as Justine rose to her feet. Amherst remained seated—he had made no motion to retain her hand as it slipped from him.

"I'm coming," she called out to the retreating nurse; then she turned slowly and saw her husband's face.

"I must go," she said in a low tone.

Her eyes met his for a moment; but he looked away again as he stood up and reached for his hat.

"Tomorrow, then——" he said, without attempting to detain her.

"To-morrow?"

"You must come away from here—you must come home," he repeated mechanically.

She made no answer, and he held his hand out and took hers. "Tomorrow," he said, drawing her toward him; and their lips met again, but not in the same kiss.

XLIII

JUNE again at Hanaford—and Cicely's birthday.

The anniversary was to coincide, this year, with the opening of the old house at Hopewood as a kind of pleasure-palace—gymnasium, concert-hall and museum—for the recreation of the mill-hands.

The idea had first come to Amherst on the winter afternoon when Bessy Westmore had confessed her love for him under the snow-laden trees of Hopewood. Even then the sense that his personal happiness was enlarged and secured by its promise of happiness to others had made him wish that the scene associated with the first moments of his new life should be made to commemorate a corresponding change in the fortunes of Westmore. But when the

control of the mills at length passed into his hands, other and more necessary improvements pressed upon him; and it was not until now that the financial condition of the company had justified the execution of his plan.

Justine, on her return to Hanaford, had found the work already in progress, and had been told by her husband that he was carrying out a projected scheme of Bessy's. She had felt a certain surprise, but had concluded that the plan in question dated back to the early days of his first marriage, when, in his wife's eyes, his connection with the mills still invested them with interest.

Since Justine had come back to her husband, both had tacitly avoided all allusions to the past, and the recreation-house at Hopewood being, as she divined, in some sort an expiatory offering to Bessy's plaintive shade, she had purposely refrained from questioning Amherst about its progress, and had simply approved the plans he submitted to her.

Fourteen months had passed since her return, and now, as she sat beside her husband in the carriage which was conveying them to Hopewood, she said to herself that her life had at last fallen into what promised to be its final shape—that as things now were they would probably be to the end. And outwardly at least they were what she and Amherst had always dreamed of their being. Westmore prospered under the new rule. The seeds of life they had sown there were springing up in a promising growth of bodily health and mental activity, and above all in a dawning social consciousness. The mill-hands were beginning to understand the meaning of their work, in its relation to their own lives and to the larger economy. And outwardly, also, the new growth was showing itself in the humanized aspect of the place. Amherst's young maples were tall enough now to cast a shade on the grass-bordered streets; and the well-kept turf, the bright cottage gardens, the new central group of library, hospital and club-house gave to the mill-village the hopeful air of a "rising" residential suburb.

In the bright June light, behind their fresh green mantle of trees and creepers, even the factory buildings looked less stern and prison-like than formerly; and the turfing and planting of the adjoining river-

banks had transformed a waste of foul mud and refuse into a little park where the operatives might refresh themselves at midday.

Yes—Westmore was alive at last: the dead city of which Justine had once spoken to Amherst had risen from its grave, and its blank face had taken on a meaning. As Justine glanced at her husband, she saw that the same thought was in his mind. However achieved, at whatever cost of personal misery and error, the work of awakening and freeing Westmore was done, and that work had justified itself.

She looked from Amherst to Cicely, who sat opposite, eager and rosy in her mourning frock—for Mr. Langhope had died some two months previously—and as intent as her step-parents upon the scene before her. Cicely was old enough now to regard her connection with Westmore as something more than a nursery game. She was beginning to learn a great deal about the mills, and to understand, in simple, friendly ways, something of her own relation to them. The work and play of the children, the interests and relaxations provided for their elders, had been gradually explained to her by Justine, and she understood that this shining tenth birthday of hers was to throw its light as far as the clouds of factory-smoke extended.

As they mounted the slope to Hopewood, the spacious white building, with its enfolding colonnades, its broad terraces and tennis-courts, shone through the trees like some bright villa adorned for its master's home-coming; and Amherst and his wife might have been driving up to the house which had been built to shelter their wedded happiness. The thought flashed across Justine as their carriage climbed the hill. She was as much absorbed as Amherst in the welfare of Westmore, it had become more and more, to both, the refuge in which their lives still met and mingled; but for a moment, as they paused before the flower-decked porch, and he turned to help her from the carriage, it occurred to her to wonder what her sensations would have been if he had been bringing her home—to a real home of their own—instead of accompanying her to another philanthropic celebration. But what need had they of a real home, when they no longer had any real life of their own? Nothing was left of that

secret inner union which had so enriched and beautified their outward lives. Since Justine's return to Hanaford they had entered, tacitly, almost unconsciously, into a new relation to each other: a relation in which their personalities were more and more merged in their common work, so that, as it were, they met only by avoiding each other.

From the first, Justine had accepted this as inevitable; just as she had understood, when Amherst had sought her out in New York, that his remaining at Westmore, which had once been contingent on her leaving him, now depended on her willingness to return and take up their former life there.

She accepted the last condition as she had accepted the other, pledged to the perpetual expiation of an act for which, in the abstract, she still refused to hold herself to blame. But life is not a matter of abstract principles, but a succession of pitiful compromises with fate, of concessions to old tradition, old beliefs, old charities and frailties. That was what her act had taught her—that was the word of the gods to the mortal who had laid a hand on their bolts. And she had humbled herself to accept the lesson, seeing human relations at last as a tangled and deep-rooted growth, a dark forest through which the idealist cannot cut his straight path without hearing at each stroke the cry of the severed branch: "*Why woundest thou me?*"

The lawns leading up to the house were already sprinkled with holiday-makers, while along the avenue came the rolling of wheels, the throb of motor-cars; and Justine, with Cicely beside her, stood in the wide hall to receive the incoming throng, in which Hanaford society was indiscriminately mingled with the operatives in their Sunday best.

While his wife welcomed the new arrivals, Amherst, supported by some young Westmore cousins, was guiding them into the concert-hall, where he was to say a word on the uses of the building before declaring it open for inspection. And presently Justine and Cicely, summoned by Westy Gaines, made their way through the rows of seats to a corner near the platform. Her husband was there already, with Halford Gaines and a group of Hanaford dignitaries, and just

below them sat Mrs. Gaines and her daughters, the Harry Dressels, and Amherst's radiant mother.

As Justine passed between them, she wondered how much they knew of the events which had wrought so profound and permanent change in her life. She had never known how Hanaford explained her absence or what comments it had made on her return. But she saw to-day more clearly than ever that Amherst had become a power among his townsmen, and that if they were still blind to the inner meaning of his work, its practical results were beginning to impress them profoundly. Hanaford sociological creed was largely based on commercial considerations, and Amherst had won Hanaford's esteem by the novel feat of defying its economic principles and snatching success out of his defiance.

And now he had advanced a step or two in front of the "representative" semi-circle on the platform, and was beginning to speak.

Justine did not hear his first words. She was looking up at him, trying to see him with the eyes of the crowd, and wondering what manner of man he would have seemed to her if she had known as little as they did of his inner history.

He held himself straight, the heavy locks thrown back from his forehead, one hand resting on the table beside him, the other grasping a folded blue-print which the architect of the building had just advanced to give him. As he stood there, Justine recalled her first sight of him in the Hope Hospital, five years earlier—was it only five years? They had dealt deep strokes to his face, hollowing the eye-sockets, accentuating the strong modelling of nose and chin, fixing the lines between the brows; but every touch had a meaning—it was not the languid hand of time which had remade his features, but the sharp chisel of thought and action.

She roused herself suddenly to the consciousness of what he was saying.

"For the idea of this building—of a building dedicated to the recreation of Westmore—is not new in my mind; but while it remained there as a mere idea, it had already without my knowledge, taken definite shape in the thoughts of the owner of Westmore."

There was a slight drop in his voice as he designated Bessy, and he waited a moment before continuing: "It was not till after the death of my first wife that I learned of her intention—that I found by accident, among her papers, this carefully-studied plan for a pleasure-house at Hopewood."

He paused again, and unrolling the blueprint, held it up before his audience.

"You cannot, at this distance," he went on, "see all the admirable details of her plan; see how beautifully they were imagined, how carefully and intelligently elaborated. She who conceived them longed to see beauty everywhere—it was her dearest wish to bestow it on her people here. And her ardent imagination outran the bounds of practical possibility. We cannot give you, in its completeness, the beautiful thing she had imagined—the great terraces, the marble porches, the fountains, lily-tanks, and cloisters. But you will see that, wherever it was possible—though in humbler materials, and on a smaller scale—we have faithfully followed her design; and when presently you go through this building, and when, hereafter, you find health and refreshment and diversion here, I ask you to remember the beauty she dreamed of giving you, and to let the thought of it make her memory beautiful among you and among your children. . ."

Justine had listened with deepening amazement. She was seated so close to her husband that she had recognized the blueprint the moment he unrolled it. There was no mistaking its origin—it was simply the plan of the gymnasium which Bessy had intended to build at Lynbrook, and which she had been constrained to abandon owing to her husband's increased expenditure at the mills. But how was it possible that Amherst knew nothing of the original purpose of the plans, and by what mocking turn of events had a project devised in deliberate defiance of his wishes, and intended to declare his wife's open contempt of them, been transformed into a Utopian vision for the betterment of the Westmore operatives?

A wave of anger swept over Justine at this last derisive stroke of fate. It was grotesque and pitiable that a man like Amherst should create out of his morbid regrets a being who had never existed, and then ascribe to her feelings and actions of which

the real woman had again and again proved herself incapable!

Ah, no, Justine had suffered enough—but to have this imaginary Bessy called from the grave, dressed in a semblance of self-devotion and idealism, to see her petty impulses of vindictiveness disguised as the motions of a lofty spirit—it was as though her small malicious ghost had devised this way of punishing the wife who had taken her place!

Justine had suffered enough—suffered deliberately and unstintingly, paying the full price of her error, not seeking to evade its least consequence. But no sane judgment could ask her to sit quiet under this last hallucination. What! This unreal woman, this phantom that Amherst's uneasy imagination had evoked, was to come between himself and her, to supplant her first as his wife, and then as his fellow-worker? Why should she not cry out the truth to him, defend herself against the dead who came back to rob her of such wedded peace as was hers? She had only to tell the true story of the plans to lay poor Bessy's ghost forever!

The confused throbbing impulses within her were stifled under a long burst of applause—then she saw Westy Gaines at her side again, and understood that he had come to lead Cicely to the platform. For a moment she clung jealously to the child's hand, hardly aware of what she did, feeling only that she was being thrust farther and farther into the background of the life she had helped to call out of chaos. Then a contrary impulse moved her. She released Cicely with a tremulous smile, and a moment later, as she sat with bent head and throbbing breast, she heard the child's treble piping out above her:

"In my mother's name, I give this house to Westmore."

Applause again—and then Justine found herself enveloped in a general murmur of compliment and congratulation. Mr. Amherst had spoken admirably—a "beautiful tribute—" ah, he had done poor Bessy justice! And to think that till now Hanaford had never fully realized how she had the welfare of the mills at heart—how it was really only *her* work that he was carrying on there! Well, he had made that perfectly clear—and no doubt Cicely was being taught to follow in her mother's

footsteps: everyone had noticed how her step-father was associating her with the work at the mills. And his little speech would, as it were, consecrate the child's relation to that work, make it appear to her as the continuance of a beautiful, a sacred tradition. . .

And now it was over. The building had been inspected, the operatives had dispersed, the Hanaford company, Cicely among them, had been sent back, tired and happy, in Mrs. Dressel's victoria (which was to be replaced by a motor next year), and Amherst and his wife were alone.

Amherst, after bidding good-bye to his last guests, had gone back to the empty concert-room, where he had left the blue-print lying on the platform. He came back with it, between the uneven rows of empty chairs, and joined Justine, who stood waiting in the hall. His face was slightly flushed, and his eyes had the light which, in moments of happy emotion, burned through their veil of thought.

He laid his hand on his wife's arm and drawing her toward a table near the doorway, spread out the blue-print before her.

"You haven't seen this, have you?" he said eagerly.

She looked down at the plan without answering, reading in the left-hand corner the architect's conventional inscription: "Swimming-tank and gymnasium designed for Mrs. John Amherst."

Amherst looked up, perhaps struck by her silence.

"But perhaps you *have* seen it—at Lynbrook? It must have been done while you were there."

The quickened throb of her blood rushed to her brain like a signal. "Speak—speak now!" the signal commanded.

Justine continued to look fixedly at the plan. "Yes, I have seen it," she said at length.

"At Lynbrook?"

"At Lynbrook."

"She showed it to you, I suppose—while I was away?"

Justine hesitated again. "Yes, while you were away."

"And did she tell you anything about it, go into detail about her wishes, her intentions?"

Now was the moment—now! As her

lips parted she looked up at her husband. The illumination still lingered on his face—and it was the face she loved. He was waiting eagerly for her next word.

"No, I heard no details. I merely saw the plan lying there."

She saw his look of disappointment. "She never told you about it?"

"No—she never told me."

It was best so, after all. She understood that now. It was now at last that she was paying her full price.

Amherst rolled up the plan with a sigh and pushed it into the drawer of the table. It struck her that he too had the look of one who has laid a ghost. He turned to her and drew her hand through his arm.

"You're tired, dear. You ought to have driven back with the others," he said.

"No, I would rather stay with you."

"You want to drain this good day to the dregs, as I do?"

"Yes," she murmured, drawing her hand away.

"It is a good day, isn't it?" he continued, looking about him at the white-panelled walls, the vista of large, bright rooms seen through the folding doors. "I feel as if we had reached a height, somehow—a height where one might pause and draw breath for the next climb. Don't you feel that too, Justine?"

"Yes—I feel it."

"Do you remember once, long ago—one day when you and I and Cicely went on a picnic to hunt orchids—how we got talking of the one best moment in life—the moment when one wanted most to stop the clock?"

The colour rose in her face while he spoke. It was a long time since he referred to the early days of their friendship—the days *before*. . .

"Yes, I remember," she said.

"And do you remember how we said that it was with most of us as it was with Faust? That the moment one wanted to hold fast to was not, in most lives, the moment of keenest personal happiness, but the other kind—the kind that would have seemed grey and colourless at first: the moment when the meaning of life began to come out from the mists—when one could look out at last over the marsh one had drained?"

A tremor ran through the inmost chords of Justine's being. "It was you who said that," she said, half-smiling.

"But didn't you feel it with me? Don't you now?"

"Yes—I do now," she murmured.

He came close to her, and taking her hands in his, kissed them, one after the other.

"Dear," he said, "let us go out and look at the marsh we have drained."

He turned and led her through the open doorway to the wide porch above the river. The sun was setting behind the wooded slopes of Hopewood, and the trees about the house stretched long blue shadows across the lawn. Beyond them rose the smoke of Westmore.

THE END.

THE DARK OF THE MOON

By Rosamund Marriott Watson

CASSIOPŒIA'S silver throne,
So crystal-clear to-night it is,
Across my orchard, blossom-strown,
I turn to watch how bright it is.

Gone is the twisted apple-bough
That framed the self-same stars of old,
No moon beyond the poplars now
Bedecks the grass with bars of gold.

Yet this grave, moonless night that folds
The silent orchard-close in gloom,
How many a fragrant promise holds,
Though there is scarce a rose in bloom.

How bright to-night, how dear the dream,
The dream of summer days to be;
The thought of wood and field and stream
New songs to know, new ways to see.

How dark those other days to come,
When happy seasons pass anew,
And find me mute and blind and numb,
No more to dream 'twixt grass and dew.

And yet—when this fair lease is run,
'Tis fresh green grass shall cover me;
My mound shall take the wind and sun,
The starry sky be over me.

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Dear is the dream, O flowers and trees,
To share the stars and sun with you,
And good to think, when God shall please,
At last I shall be one with you.