THE SIXTH SENSE

"Don't take it so, Helen. You were prepared for this, my dear; it might be so much worse."

"Worse! Oh, mother, this is the worst!"

"Oh, no, no, dear—no! You aren't a mother yourself, or you'd feel at once what I mean. The last six months of doubts nearly maddened me. Now that we know he is dead, it is we only who suffer; but alive—he might be enduring everything."

Helen shuddered rebelliously, lifting her head from her mother's knee and wiping away her tears.

"Mamma, I can't look at things the way you do. You only allow a choice between Jack horribly maimed or dead. I can't think of him as anything but alive and well, and so strong and big, and loving us so."

"Don't, don't, dear!" cried the mother, sharply. She broke into sudden, violent weeping. "I can't stand this. Let me bear it my own way."

The two women clung together again, the ruthless young lips that had beaten down the mother's hard-won philosophy showering repentant kisses.

"Do you think," Helen whispered, softly, "that it would hurt you too much to tell me a little more now?"

"I should like to," said Mrs. Duain, simply. "It always helps me, to talk things over. The young fellow was very kind. He said he would have come to see us before, but he was wounded himself at Gettysburg—not an hour after he left our boy dead on the field—and ill in hospital for a long time. And then he didn't know we had no news of Jack. It was the merest chance goodness of heart, a kindness for a dead comrade, that made him come to us. He thought we might like to know what Jack's last words were. He saw the last breath leave his lips; his knee was under Jack's head as he passed away, just as mine is under yours, Helen."

"Oh, mamma!" groaned the girl, protesting involuntarily.

"I won't tell you more if it distresses you, dear. I preferred to hear all myself, though I felt it impossible to bear at first, just as you do."

"Don't tell me any more, mamma — later perhaps. But just one thing—what were his last words?"

"Of us, dear: 'Mother—Helen—my love.' That was what his comrade came to bring us."

The mother's lips quivered as she gave the message, but she would not give way. Helen sobbed uncontrollably.

"Oh, Jack! Dear, dearest Jack! To remember me too—to send us his love—"

Mrs. Duain laid her hand comfortingly on the bowed head.

"I have something more to tell you, something that ought to comfort you. It has me," she said, softly. "Those last words were not all for you and me. They seemed to be only a message to us; even his messenger thought they were; but it was not just your name and mine and his love to us that Jack meant, Helen. Those last two words, 'My Love,' were not as a message to us at all, but as a *name* to him. He has left us a legacy."

Helen sat upright on the floor at her mother's feet, pushing back the hair from her wet face and looking up in wonder.

"Something very extraordinary and very beautiful has happened. I have lost a son and gained a daughter in the same hour. Did

you know that Jack was engaged to be married?"

Helen did not reply in words. Motionless listening answered for her ignorance.

"It's quite true, dear; she has just told me herself. She came in to call formally—a formal call from her seems strange to think of now; she was shown into this room just as Jack's comrade left me. I was utterly overcome. You were away, and I needed some one. Poor child! she was needing care herself. And there was I, blind thing, crying and sobbing and blurting out the news of my loss to her. I might have gone on forever if I hadn't heard something in her voice that made me look up suddenly, and then I saw her poor face; but the voice was enough. Do you remember the story of the old friend who wrote to a widow when her husband died just two words—'Oh, Madam!' That story always touched me so. All this poor child said was, 'Oh, Mrs. Duain!' and it was like a tortured cry."

Helen caught her mother's hands eagerly—so much hung on a word, a name.

"But, mamma, you haven't told me—you haven't once said—"

"Hush!" whispered Mrs. Duain, quickly; "here she is. Did you suppose I could part

with her at once? Don't let her know that I have told you, Helen. It is important, remember."

She had as well spoken warningly to the shifting winds. Every line of her daughter's expressive face was always as speakingly telltale as the mother's. As she now turned with intense eagerness towards the opening door, the woman who appeared on the threshold had only to give one glance at her before she paused, shrinking into the sheltering curtain and crying out, in a breathless reproach,

"Oh, Mrs. Duain, you said you would tell no one!"

Mrs. Duain hurried forward, but not so quickly as Helen. The young girl, with charming impulsiveness, sprang to the doorway and twined her arms about the reluctant figure thus hovering as it were on the outskirts of their family life. She drew her into the room with a large and generous motion of her strong young arms, that seemed to say this was but a symbol of what her heart was doing.

"Mamma couldn't help telling me. Wouldn't it have been cruel not to tell me? I shall love you so dearly. And you will love me, won't you, An—Annita?" She stumbled a little over the name, and laughed, half embarrassed, half

tearful. "That's your name, isn't it? It seems absurd that I shouldn't be quite sure, but, you see, I haven't known you so very well—though I always liked you; and now shall you be able to love me?"

Annita Andrews—for that was her name—looked silently and wistfully from one to the other, her eyes lingering last on the eager young face pressing near hers. In appearance she was as unlike the mother and daughter, with their clever, irregular features and vivid faces, as it was possible to be. There could never have been a woman born into the Duain family with so delicately regular or so sealed a face. Beauty of feature and a certain charm of contrasting coloring she had, for the brown eyes were clear and soft, the contour of the face was beautiful and finely cut, the brow under the fair hair was shapely and low; but, with so much said, there was still to be ardently desired something that was missing. The face was uninteresting, lacking wholly change and charm of expression. There was no proof of that delightful perceptiveness and receptiveness which can render the plainest face womanly and attractive. An occasional wistfulness in the too shallow brown of the eyes, a slightly appealing droop of the mouth, were the only

claims to expression made by features that might have been extremely lovely if but a little less sealed. This was the woman who was vainly striving to reply to Helen Duain's impetuous approach, vainly seeking a voice which it seemed she could not force to obey her. Twice she tried to answer, but her words died away as they came; and at last, with a glance of appealing reproach towards Mrs. Duain, she turned aside, burying her face in her hands.

"You have frightened her, dear. Give her to me," said Mrs. Duain, compassionately; but Helen, with a stir at her breast, thought she felt the girl she still held in her arms move towards her, though ever so slightly, and drew her closer possessively. To take one to her, Mrs. Duain had to take both; but of this her motherly arms were capable.

"I'm a hopelessly leaky old woman, my dear," she said. "You must try to forgive me, Anita. But, you see, Helen came in *just* after you had told me, and it seemed as if I had to tell her. If you hadn't *just* told me—"

She broke off with the implication that under other circumstances she would surely have guarded the secret jealously, which she doubtless believed, but none the less it was far from the truth, for Mrs. Duain was quite right when

she described herself as hopelessly leaky. Her sympathy was too sweet and real to lose at any price, so her friends went on confiding in her, even though knowing in the very moments of confidence that the price must be betrayal at some date, late or early, and a betrayal so naïve and inevitable that no one could complain very bitterly. Nor did Annita complain now, beyond that first reproachful glance.

"My two daughters!" said Mrs. Duain, with feeling, drawing the two heads down, one on either shoulder.

"Of course I love you, because you're a part of Jack," whispered Helen, across her mother's bosom. "If only Jack could see us now!"

"He does!" cried Mrs. Duain, fervently, glancing up; "he does!"

Quick tears fell from her lashes down on the face of the girl she held so closely for that son's sake; and as they fell, Annita looked up with a struggling, gasping breath. She spoke as if with an agony of effort.

"I—I can't stand this. I—"

"What are we thinking of?" cried Mrs. Duain. "Of course this is too much for her." With her usual quickness of motion she thrust Helen from her and passed her hand over the

new daughter's quivering features, closing down the eyelids soothingly. "Rest there, my dear child. Stop thinking for a moment. No, don't try to talk." She stopped the quivering lips with her soft, motherly touch. The girl's face lay heavily on her shoulder. "Helen," cried Mrs. Duain, suddenly, "come quickly; she has fainted. Help me to the couch. Oh, poor, poor child!"

If Annita Andrews had been capable of thinking out a deliberate plan by which to steal her way most quickly into the hearts of Jack Duain's mother and sister, she could have fallen on no more subtle and instant method than this very real illness. It seemed at once to differentiate her grief from theirs, and set it apart as something more peculiarly sacred. Mrs. Duain knew that she still had one child, and Helen that she still had her mother; but both knew that Annita Andrews had nothing more of a home and family life than a room in an aunt's house—a home already complete in family and interests long before her entrance. In a vague, motherly way Mrs. Duain had often pitied the shy, undemonstrative girl, though that pity had never gone so far as to reach the point of interest. Annita Andrews had always seemed to her to lack place and

background as a personal inheritance, and had never been able to conquer these for herself. Something of all this Mrs. Duain murmured in pitying accents to Helen across the unconscious figure, and Helen was thinking it all over as she sat by the side of the couch, gently chafing Annita's hands, and applying such home remedies as her mother's experience supplied. When the physician they had summoned came hurrying in he made no change in the treatment, pronouncing the attack harmless. It was, in fact, already beginning to yield. It seemed to Helen that she could see the swoon breaking under their efforts as still water breaks when a stone is flung into it. Signs of consciousness formed and broke and formed again in the white face, always in wider and wider circles. Now the eyelids quivered, and again the lips moved.

"Had she a fall?" the physician asked. He was an old family friend as well. "Did she have a fall or a blow?"

And Mrs. Duain assented: "A very heavy blow. My dear friend, we have just heard with certainty of my boy's death."

The physician forgot his patient and looked up quickly. "At last! And what we all feared. Any news is better than none, dear madam,

believe me. So he is really gone, and only last night we were talking of him."

"Where?" asked Mrs. Duain, with that eagerness for hearing praise of the dead which belongs to all who have lost by death—as our one poor hope of their earthly immortality. The old friend understood and humored the mother's wish.

"At a little dinner party. I wish you could have been there, only no ladies were present. Some one chanced to speak your boy's name, and there was instant silence. Then some one else said, out loud, 'How that man is remembered!' I sat next our host. I could see the water rise in his eyes as he got to his feet. '*Jack Duain*,' was all he said. We rose up to drink without another word. Nobody wanted to speak. That's the man he was. A son to miss indeed; a friend to lament. Do you mean me to understand that my patient here—" He paused.

"Yes," said Mrs. Duain, choking and wiping her eyes. "Oh yes, poor child. If he had lived she would have been his wife."

"Poor child indeed!" said the physician, with more than professional pity.

"Be quiet," cried Helen; "she hears us. I think she has heard you both all the time."

She had seen the last confining circle breaking. The color was rising in Annita's face; she opened her eyes and looked up at them. The physician approached gently, but his patient turned away sharply from his pitying gaze and again closed her eyes. He respected her implied wish.

"Her pulse is stronger," he said to Mrs. Duain. "She will do very well now, only I should advise entire quiet for a week at least. There has been a severe shock. I wish her aunt's house were a little less gay, a little less full of young people. Hers is anything but a quiet home."

"How much quieter could ours be!" said Mrs. Duain, quickly—"only Helen and me, and our house now one of mourning."

"Ah!" said the physician, bowing himself out from the room and from this story; "I understand. She is safer with you than with me, I see. You are still a good mother to your son, my dear Mrs. Duain."

Mrs. Duain sat down by the other side of the couch from Helen. "You heard, my dear," she said, quietly; "will you stay with us for a time and let us care for you?"

Annita looked up at her with a dazed expression. She struggled to sit up on the couch.

"Let you care for me?" she repeated. "Oh yes, yes; but I can't stay here. I can't stay here."

Both words and manner were feverishly distressed.

"Why not?" said Mrs. Duain, soothingly. "Now, my child, be reasonable. You are ill, but not too ill for me to talk a little plain sense to you. You know, we all know, that your aunt's house is not exactly a home to you. Indeed, it is not a home to any of them. They have never seemed to me to pause long enough to know each other—to love each other and show it. Why, caresses are as natural to Helen and me as breathing and living. Oh yes, I know they are all kind to you, but—is it like this?" And she stooped and gathered the girl into her arms.

"Don't refuse us," pleaded Helen, on the other side. "Don't, dear Annita. Pray, pray stay with us."

"Let us say only for this one week, then," urged Mrs. Duain, quick to yield part where she saw it wise.

Annita, her head languidly resting on Mrs. Duain's motherly shoulder, looked still, as if dazzled, from one eloquent face to the other, each saying quite as much in silence as when their lips spoke.

"I never saw love like this before," she faltered. Her lips quivered, her face flushed, and her eyes and mouth grew as self-pitiful as a lost child's. Mrs. Duain thought she had never seen her so near great beauty.

"I can only just remember my parents," the girl went on, brokenly, "and then came boarding-school, and then my aunt's home, and—yes, they are kind there, but it's not like this. No, I never saw love like this."

"Except from Jack," corrected Helen.

The crimson shot up over the white face in a blush so painful that Mrs. Duain, startled by the change, laid her finger on her lips, glancing silencingly at Helen. But in her heart she was exulting in the sight of a love that held its privacy so sacred. Death seemed less a separation when a girl's cheek blushed hotly for him who was gone from them forever. With a quick, womanly motion she stooped and hid the flushed face against her own protectingly. She could feel that Annita lay more and more closely in her warm embrace; her hand was timidly returning the clasp of Helen's hand. Suddenly she lifted her head strongly and withdrew from them both; but it was only to hold out her hands anew, with a motion as if offering herself freely to each of them. There

was so little of native impulsiveness about her that the gesture carried more meaning than from another less reserved and shy.

"You will stay!" cried Helen, joyfully.

"I must," she answered. "I can't—no, I can't turn away love like this. I must take it, if only for this week." She paused to steady her voice. When she spoke again the effort made it seem almost hard. "Only for this week," she repeated, firmly.

It was rather an anxious week they spent together, as it could hardly fail to be with the conditions given. In the first place, little complications began at once to arise that ought to have been readily foretold, but that were evidently unforeseen by Annita, whose shrinking wish to keep her secret was the cause of trouble. The mere fact of her presence in the house at this time was, as Mrs. Duain well knew it must be, fair ground for comment; and there, too, were the girl's relations to be considered. After due thought, Mrs. Duain, who had her own rather imperial methods of adjusting affairs, made up her mind as to her course of action, and Annita's as well. The engagement was to be announced, not formally, but by a word spoken here and there. She meant to take no action without Annita's per-

mission, but that permission she intended to have.

Annita Andrews, and indeed all of her family, though with as desirable a social standing as her own, had never interested Mrs. Duain particularly, and therefore they had never been allowed to know her except as an impersonal and delightful acquaintance. She knew now with shrewd intuition that through her circle of personal friends, Annita Andrews would learn to know her far better and more rapidly than by the most intimate personal relations. For this reason, among others, she would not wholly close her home as one of mourning. Outside, with its folded shutters and storm-doors bowed, the house wore that strangely human look of sad dignity which belongs to a closed home when death has touched the lintel ; but within life went on almost as it had before the coming of definite news of loss. It had been a house of doubt and semi-mourning for months. Now it was only certainty of grief. Friends came and went, bringing their messages of affection and sympathy, and all were received by Mrs. Duain, and to all she presented Annita Andrews with a quiet dignity which forbade questions, and yet with so careful recognition of her place as a member of the family that

her manner could not fail to make its due impression. Very evidently what the girl herself longed for was to be let alone and allowed to look on in silence at this revealed family life, full of love and real friendships—plainly very different from anything to which she was accustomed. She tried always to sit a little apart, rather pale and with puzzled eyes, looking out from over her clasped hands, which she constantly held against her face, hiding lips that seemed to Helen's pitying eyes to be always quivering slightly. But this remoteness and silence was what Mrs. Duain would not allow. No one could have doubted her adoration of her son, but an unwholesome mourning in her house by herself or any one else was what she would not tolerate. She talked of her son constantly and to every one, as often with laughter as with tears; for there was much in Jack Duain's short and merry life to recall with laughter. Helen expostulated with her mother in vain. To the younger woman there was a species of cruelty in the constant rousing of Annita from her dazed and dream-like condition, in the forcing her to meet new friends at this time. But Mrs. Duain had decided otherwise.

"We must rouse her," she insisted. "Don't

you see this is our chance to reach her now, while she is stirred? It's just as important for us to know her as for her to know us; and do you know her at all? I don't, yet half our week has gone. Hers is a very sealed nature. No, you must let me follow my own instinct."

But despite her theories, Mrs. Duain began to yield to an uncomfortable wonder if they ever could know Annita Andrews much better. She knew that some women were born to blow open wide as roses—she herself was one of these—while others were born to live tightly closed as button-flowers, and with the latter she began to classify Annita Andrews. There was something baffling, something inexpressibly trying, to her in the very docility and gentleness of this intimate yet stranger guest. Even the meeting-ground of a common grief had been practically closed from the first, for each effort to draw Annita to speech concerning her lover caused such evident suffering that Mrs. Duain had not the heart to persist too far in that direction. Yet something, she felt, must be done, for the girl's shyness and silence seemed to be increasing rather than decreasing, and the week of her promised stay was passing. It was then that the elder woman decided on a serious step, and only waited

for the best opportunity to take it safely. That chance seemed to her to open most fairly on the night when the mourning-bonnets came home—those last details of costume. On that evening Mrs. Duain, more full of thought than she showed, walked up the stairs to bed, a veil-draped bonnet in either hand, and another on her head. Having no free hand with which to hold her skirts away from her feet, she walked up the stairs with extreme difficulty, escaping her petticoats only by stepping in a pigeon-toed way, as do all women caught in like case. She was laughing like a girl at her own awkwardness, but seemed to be enjoying the exercise, for she refused aid, and at the upper landing turned to look smilingly down on the two girls following her.

"I did it," she said, merrily. "And look up at me, girls! Isn't this Madame Milliner going to bed?"

Helen, her hand still on the balustrade, stopped, and laughing naturally, looked up at the black-draped figure; but the mother glanced beyond her and keenly at Annita. As the light from the high hall lamp fell full upon the girl's upraised face, Mrs. Duain thought she found there a fresher look and a less forced smile than had before met her jesting on such

subjects—appropriate or inappropriate, as one received it. Most of us talk of our weeds and try them on with faces in accord with their coloring. Mrs. Duain did neither. As her eyes now met Annita's, the girl's lips parted in a distinct smile, sweet and natural and shyly affectionate. Her brown eyes (so pretty in color, but monotonous somehow to Mrs. Duain, used to her daughter's vivid face, and indeed to her own changing features as shown in her mirror) were shining a little. The light hair, too, seemed to lie more loosely, and therefore more acceptably to the older woman, who in her rich ripeness hated sleekness of any kind. They had passed a long evening alone together family-wise, and after it as Annita stood there on the stair she seemed more one of them. There was a subtle loosening, not of the hair only, but of her whole being. Mrs. Duain decided quickly that the hour for action had at last come.

"We don't want to go to bed yet, do we, Helen?" she said. "Come in here with us, my dear; let's have a real hair-brushing talk. I never feel that I know a woman until I once brush my hair with her."

"But ought I to keep you, Mrs. Duain? Look at the clock."

The old hall timepiece was pointing to a late hour, yet Annita's hesitation was plainly more wistful than real.

"Oh, I did look at that old thing, and I looked right away again," said Mrs. Duain, waving both time and the reverend clock aside. "I don't want to remember how late it is. Go get your brushes and combs and wrapper and slippers, and we will have a real old-fashioned hair-brushing."

But with all her perfectly spontaneous and almost girlish charm of manner, Mrs. Duain was a determined woman of the world, with an object in view to attain and a resolute will to attain it within the hour. She was not thinking seriously of clocks, nor of dressing-gowns and slippers, and she showed that she was not when Annita returned burdened with toilet articles.

"Come here, my dear," she said. "Throw those things down on the bed and come here. Do you mind trying this on for me? I don't seem to be able to fit it on my own head"— which was not unnatural, as it was not for her head that Mrs. Duain had ordered the veiled bonnet. It fitted Annita admirably, as if it had been made for her — indeed it had been, with her own stolen bonnet as model.

"And now," went on Mrs. Duain, as one absorbed in her subject, "will you mind slipping this on?"

This was one of Helen's gowns, for which Annita had once stood as block, the girls' figures being sufficiently alike to allow this saving of Helen's overtaxed strength. A few moments later the cheval-glass reflected Annita's figure dressed in a full costume of perfectly fitting mourning, at which Mrs. Duain gazed with affectionate approval, half sad, half satisfied. Helen stood by, looking on with eyes wherein some mischief lurked. Her mother's careful schemes always amused the daughter. The two faces were reflected in the glass, one over each of Annita's shoulders, and as she chanced to glance from one to the other she stared for a moment, started, and then wheeled around with a little cry, half dismay, half question.

"My dear," said Mrs. Duain, soothingly—"my dear, why shouldn't you? Did you suppose I was ordering all these gowns and all these bonnets just for Helen and me? Aren't you my daughter, too? Won't you be one of us, dear? We were a little family of three. Let us keep that number."

But Annita had sunk down on the side of

the bed, leaning against the foot-board for support, her eyes dilating and fixed on Mrs. Duain, who went on with an unwonted nervousness under that insistent questioning look. She had not believed those light brown eyes capable of expressing such demand.

"I think it really best, really wisest, Annita, as—as you have already stayed with us this week. Of course it is for you to decide, but I think it far wiser." Annita looked down at the black gown, and her face seemed to close with a seal. Whether she wished to throw the gown off or not, Mrs. Duain could not at the moment tell, and for the thousandth time she wished the girl's face were more flexible. If it had been Jack or Helen, she could have unerringly read their inmost feelings in a moment. "Of course it is for you to decide," she repeated.

"Is it left for me to decide?" The question, the glance that went with it, were quick, almost stern, and Mrs. Duain, unaccustomed to sternness from any one, was too surprised to reply. Annita went on in set tones: "I heard you tell the doctor everything. I supposed you had to tell him, but have you told any one else?"

Mrs. Duain actually stammered a little as

she tried to reply. She was thinking that this was not in the least what she had expected of the passive girl she had been watching through the week. Whatever else she lacked, there was plainly no shortage of courage. When cornered she would fight. But Mrs. Duain herself was a brave woman, and when she finally rose to the occasion it was to face fully the consequences of her acts.

"I am afraid I have made a dreadful mistake," she said, gravely. "My dear Annita, I am not, and I never have been, a very trustworthy woman in keeping a secret. I don't mean to break confidence, but I know I do. Now I shall have to ask a great faith of you when I say that until this moment I honestly did not know I was telling your secret. I meant to gain your permission first, but as I sit here and see you look at me in this way, I know that I have done and said things that were just the same as speaking outright. I am so distressed! I ask your forgiveness most humbly. I am ashamed to the quick; but that doesn't undo anything."

Helen's daughterly impulse was to run to her mother and forcibly stop her humiliating herself before Annita Andrews. And yet, except for that intense gaze, Annita was not ac-

cepting the confession offensively. She seemed, in fact, to be scarcely hearing it. She was now looking down and stroking the folds of crape on the wrist of the unfortunate gown.

"Mrs. Duain," she said, more gently, "did the woman who made this dress know?"

Mrs. Duain flushed. "I—I am afraid so. I should have said 'No, of course not,' an hour ago, but now—yes, my dear, I do remember intimating that you might be the one to wear it."

"Then that was why she told me her lover was killed in the war?"

"I suppose so," said Mrs. Duain, miserably. "I suppose she thought you could understand better than any one else. She didn't mean to be impertinent, I am sure."

"Oh no, I didn't think so. But she must have thought me very cold. I never dreamed she knew, and people haven't told me such things as a rule." She paused again in the same absent way, stroking the crape. "And my aunt?" she asked, finally, with another searching glance.

Mrs. Duain flushed at the question. Her lip quivered. She was not used to being catechised, but she still answered with a meekness that flushed her daughter's face: "Yes, my dear, there I did speak almost openly. You

must have known I would have to give her some explanation of your staying here."

"Then, I suppose, that was why she told me all about losing her first lover. I knew my grandfather sent some one away before my uncle came. And when my uncle came to see me he told me all about his first wife's death. I wondered why at the time. I never was told these things before. Do you suppose it's because I"—she looked up questioningly—"because they think I'll understand now?"

"Oh yes, dear," cried Mrs. Duain, eagerly—"yes; that's one of the compensations for letting others know of our sufferings. Nobody wants to tell anything to happy young things who can't really understand. You'll find all the suffering world open to you if you will only let it know that you have suffered."

Annita sat gazing into space. Her eyes had lost the stern look that questioned Mrs. Duain, and seemed to be ardently questioning all life.

"As I think of it, it seems to me everybody I have seen this week has told me something. Is that a sign they all knew?" She turned her eyes full on Mrs. Duain again. "Even your friends, people I never knew before, have talked with me. They wouldn't if they hadn't known all. I feel they wouldn't. Has every

one who came near me been told—every one in the house, even the servants? Susan told me yesterday she was soon to marry the coachman."

"Oh, Annita," cried Helen, with deep offence, "how can you berate mamma so? I won't allow it. If she has done wrong, she's told you she's sorry."

"Being sorry doesn't put the wine back in the bottle, Helen," said Mrs. Duain, her voice quivering. "I have spilled Annita's secret, and she has the right to be angry."

Annita started as if waking from a dream.

"Angry! But I'm not angry." Her eyes filled with quick tears; her face flushed distressfully; she spoke hurriedly, with the pain of one utterly misunderstood. "Sometimes I think I must have frozen water in my veins instead of blood. I can't thaw quickly. I don't know how. I don't know what to say now—only—I do know I want to wear this—this dress, if you'll both let me."

The last words came suddenly and she rose, trembling with excitement, both hands appealingly out-stretched. Her changed attitude, the influence of the accepted mourning garb that draped her standing figure, the timid entreaty of her hands and voice, all drew Mrs.

Duain and Helen fluttering to her with an entirely new sense of womanly relation. The breath of a strengthening sentiment blew them together as the little whirlwinds draw up feathers; and like soft feathered things, and with the prettiest nestlings, the two women, to whom caresses were the natural expression of feeling, drew near the one they were teaching to be like themselves. It seemed to Mrs. Duain that she could actually feel the girl changing and softening in her hands. She had a theory of her own that all womankind properly belonged to the dove-cote, and should wear their softness outside; and though some, by a mischance, might come to wear their feathers inside, as a heavy casing confines a soft pillow, a little slit in the cover or a hard thrust would invariably discover that there were normal contents enclosed. Annita had received both slits and thrusts in this week, and the last experience of the hour had been a hard one. While she clung to them with a shy happiness and timidly gave loving touch for touch, she showed the strain she had suffered in the pallor that followed her excitement; and Mrs. Duain, with tenderest motherly solicitude, carried her off to her room at last, not leaving her until she had seen her laid in her bed with her weary head

on the pillow. As she bent over the girl for a last kiss, Annita flung her arm suddenly around her neck, drawing the kind face down to hers.

"Oh," she whispered, softly, "you don't know what you have done for me. I only began to live one week ago to-day, when you first took me in your arms."

It was more than a year and a half after Gettysburg, and therefore after peace was declared, when a warm summer morning found Jack Duain, as one risen from the dead, entering his native town. He walked slowly and nervously down the well-known platform, waving aside the whips of the same old drivers he had left there when he went away with his regiment. He knew every one of them, but not one recognized him, and, a little dazed at their blindness, he walked, still as if disguised, into the streets, with feet familiar to every stone that had stubbed his bare toes when, as an obstinate and hardy boy, he would distress his mother by running barefooted through the town. There was something uncanny to him in the way those he knew as he knew himself looked him over carelessly as a passing stranger; but after the first shock of surprise what he began to dread was that he should at last meet some one

who would know him and tell him news that he longed for yet feared to learn. When at last he reached his own house his courage failed utterly on the door-step, and he turned off without ringing the bell, but only to make his way to the wicket-gate that closed in the garden at the side of the house. Once in the garden, he slipped from bush to bush as cautiously as when he and Helen had played hide-and-seek there together as children, stealing from behind the tulip-tree to the snowball-bush, from the sweet-smelling shrub-bush to the sweeter magnolia-tree. These old familiar odors spoke to him of the past, and the old childish haunts pulled at his heartstrings. Even the air, kind and sunny, seemed the weather he best remembered, and all combined to quicken his imagination and make his heart beat with foreboding. Human changes might be waiting for him beyond this unaltered nature and within the unchanged stone and mortar of the old house that rose before him. Were strangers in the home? At last he paused under the jutting bay-window of the low room where in the old days he knew his mother and Helen would have been sitting at this hour. Here, crouched down like a thief, he listened, holding his breath.

"My dear," came a clear rich voice floating out from the open window above him into the warm air, "I beg of you, don't open that umbrella in the house. I'm not exactly superstitious, but then—"

"Everybody knows it's too unlucky to open umbrellas in the house," said a lighter, because younger, laughing voice, like an echo of the old one.

"Open the umbrella out of the window, Annita, and mend it that way."

There was girlish laughter within, and then out came the closed umbrella from the smilax-covered window-frame. A woman's white hand followed, pressing the catch open and shaking and unfurling the silk. It was all so foolish, so simple and homelike and sweet, to the hungry ears outside. A great thanksgiving swelled in Jack Duain's heart. They were not gone, not dead, nor even changed. How often had he been warned by that same loved voice as to the unnecessary recklessness of opening an umbrella in the house! It was the old house, the old habits, the dear old superstitions. He had come back from the dead to find them all unchanged—all just as he left them, those he loved and those who loved him. They were not too broken either

by his supposed loss, for they could still laugh and jest as of old. For this last he had no resentment. He was in a moment like a boy again, and moved to surprise them as a thoughtless boy might. He rose softly to his feet, shielded by the wide-open umbrella. The waving ferrule seemed to him to be poking at him jocosely as the mender jerked it awkwardly back and forth. He caught it, and thrusting his shield above his head, was face to face with Annita Andrews.

There was an instant outcry in the room, a rushing to and fro, a tumultuous excitement, but the mother's voice was piercing to his ears through and above all. The appealing cry of a child on the mother's ear is most insisted upon, but there is a mother's cry as well, and whether he was dragged into the room or somehow scrambled in to where he might fall at his mother's feet and reach the mother's arms, the son could not have told. He only knew that he was there, and the long days and suffering nights were now as far in the past as all troubles had seemed when as a child he had cried out in the dark and waked to feel those same warm arms about him. He opened his eyes after a little and looked up to laugh at himself and at her, but tenderly.

"Don't look down on me like that, mammy dear; I'm all right now, and I was all right weeks ago, only I was afraid to come home. I didn't know what I might find here. When I stood outside there and heard your voices—well, I always thought they were sweet voices, but I didn't know how sweet. Don't you want to know where I've been and what I've been doing? I've died twice since I saw you, mammy dear."

He showed it all, Mrs. Duain thought, touching his face with gentle finger-tips, as if she scarcely believed it real. It was Helen who listened to the quick, dramatic account of the awakening from that first death on the battlefield, the chance succor by the enemy, the unconscious days, the months in a prison-hospital, the half-recovery, and then the long, hopeless days of prison life that followed. On these last he would not dwell. Through all ran the strain of a desperate, unremitting effort to get news of home, to send home news of himself—efforts which they knew too well had all miscarried. Last of all, half due to the prison life, half to his own beating at the bars, came a fever that seemed to kill again. Waking to life for the second time, it was to ask his own name, and as memory came slowly

back he learned that the war was over, peace declared, and he himself, though free to go where he would, had been only a troublesome prisoner and a hospital number for so long a space of time that after these troubled days a return to life and home and family needed first the question asked and answered, Is there home and family left to receive the lost one? This question he had come himself to ask, waiting beyond the time when his bodily strength was sufficient, because he dreaded the possible test on sick brain and weakened nerve if the answers were fatally wrong. All this Helen learned, partly with tender questioning, partly by listening with loving interruptions and exclamations of sympathy; but Mrs. Duain could only listen vaguely, having actual brain-room for no more than this joy of restitution. Yet, being above all a practical woman, if a mother, she began gradually to grasp the wonderful fact that her son had come back to her, even more, not less, than when he left. By the time her knees had ceased to tremble under the sweet pressure of his head, her keen eyes had noted the stronger and nobler lines of the irregular features, the firmer fold of the lips, and the quiet strength of the steady hands that had been so restless with life. He was

thin, he was worn and weak, but the vigorous life was all there yet—there was nothing lost of the Jack Duain that had been, and much gained. He had left her a jocund boyish man, and he had come back jocund still, she hoped, but with a developed manhood. Her motherly pride swelled her heart. She had mourned him bravely as a hero dying for his country; there was a stifling joy in having him a hero still, yet alive, growing into this ripe manhood, and more than ever all her own. Then she was suddenly and for a moment sickeningly reminded that there were more ways of losing a son than those supplied by battle and sudden death.

"Didn't I see some one else here when I broke in?" asked Duain, and after a shock of quick recollection and a little struggle with herself, his mother stooped and kissed him, whispering:

"How selfish I have been! But I could only think of you at first. She must have run away. Helen—"

"Just one moment, mamma," begged the sister—"just one moment more all to ourselves. I want to tell Jack something, myself." She was standing before her brother with her hands clasped tightly, and with the prettiest

air of embarrassment, both mother and brother thought.

"Don't you remember, when you thought you were dying on that dreadful field and you sent us that dear message by one of your comrades—Mr. Griffin?"

"Griffin, was it? I didn't remember which one I sent."

"Well—well—" Helen halted, plainly dashed by this extraordinary forgetfulness. Mrs. Duain assisted her, smiling:

"The message was four words in all, wasn't it, and one to Helen? It's taken Mr. Griffin a great many hours to deliver Helen's part of it to her, Jack. Yes, he's taking her away from us."

"He's doing no such thing, mamma. He will settle here; near you; he said so. And, besides—

"'A son's a son till he gets him a wife;
But a daughter's a daughter all the days of her life.'"

She smiled significantly at her brother, whose surprised and sincere pleasure in her news flushed her face happily. She listened greedily to all he could say in praise of the lover, whom he now vowed he had sent to her

for no other purpose than the one he had accomplished.

"You didn't!" asserted Helen. "You said just now you'd forgotten whom you sent"; and they wrangled over the matter as they had always laughingly wrangled together. It was all so natural, all music to Mrs. Duain. She could have listened for hours, but her conscience was now awake, and her duty to another pressed upon her.

"Helen, you are not being kind, dear," she said. "You, of all people, ought to remember that some one wants Jack now, and Jack must be craving the sight of some one more than he wants us."

Jack Duain wheeled round from his sister's side, facing his mother.

"What!" he exclaimed.

Helen shook her finger at him with a little *moue*. "Oh, you needn't pretend any longer; and as I told you my secret, I do think it's mean of you—"

"Helen," broke in Mrs. Duain, "go and order some luncheon for your brother. He must need it."

"I don't," said the son, laughing. "But, if you want, Helen will go and look for that white horse you used to send us to look for

when you wanted to talk with father. Won't you, Helen? That's what mother means. How good it is to be home and hear all the old songs!"

He was laughing, and so was Helen, but Mrs. Duain could only force a smile. She might have agreed with Helen in thinking Jack only desirous of concealing his love-affair from them, but that her quick ear had caught a sincerity of surprise in his hasty exclamation. She gave an earnest signal to Helen, who left them, at once sobered by the gravity of her mother's face. Mrs. Duain joined her son at the window towards which he had moved. He was looking down the street in a direction which a little relieved her anxious forebodings. It seemed to her as if one finger loosened of a hand that was clutching her heart.

"Yes," she said, softly, almost pleadingly, "that is where you used to find her. But now, dear, she is here more than there. Don't try to keep anything back from me. I know it all —and from herself."

She looked into her son's face as he turned it to her, and the finger that had loosened closed down again and tightened on her heart. They stood gazing at each other until the mounting terror in her mind spoke in Mrs.

Duain's eyes so plainly that her son answered it.

"Now look here, mother; I'm not crazy. I didn't come home, and I wouldn't, until I was sure I was all right, after the fever. But there's something all wrong here somewhere. I pledge you my honor I haven't the least idea of what you are talking about; but I don't think you are crazy for that reason, and you mustn't think I am."

He looked at her with a frank eye as sane as her own. Though he spoke humorously, the new and more serious strength of manhood which she had recognized in his face was in his manner, and so convincingly that Mrs. Duain put her hands to her head, distrusting her own senses.

"Then who is crazy?" she said, despairingly —"you, or I, or Annita Andrews?"

"Annita Andrews!" repeated Duain. "Annita Andrews!" There was now not so much bewilderment in his tone as indignation at the name suggested. "Why, I never so much as looked at her seriously. She never interested me in the slightest degree."

Mrs. Duain deliberately turned and sat down again in her chair before she could reply. There was something here for discussion that could not be entered into in any casual way. Her

son drew nearer to her and laid his hand on her shoulder.

"What is it, mother?" he said, kindly. "Why are you so troubled?" In his voice and touch Mrs. Duain felt instantly that there was something stronger than either death or marriage which might again take her son from her—his individuality. Before he left her he had been charmingly independent of all but herself, manly and original to a fault, but the last word of influence had always lain with her. That, she now knew, was over forever. He had never been kind to her before. It had been his to be devoted, hers to be kind. As her quick brain leaped to these conclusions, she knew at the same time that, whatever fatal mistake lay behind this complication, it was too late for her to give up the girl who seemed to be its victim.

"What is it, mother?" said Duain, again.

And then, in a kind of despair, she opened her lips and told him everything, from the day of Annita's entrance into the house to the moment when he saw her under the umbrella at the window. As the threads of the story reeled off, Duain listened at first with evident astonishment, then more and more blankly. At last he rose, brushing his hands across his face

as if wiping away cobwebs of belief that clung despite him.

"Wearing mourning for me! Living as my widow! Upon my word, I never heard of such a thing in my life! Don't tell me any more, mother. I shall begin to believe in it all myself. It's the most curious sensation! My widow! Can she be deranged?"

"No, she is not. None of us is deranged," said Mrs. Duain. A theory was forming in her own mind, which she was not yet prepared to advance, but every moment she believed in it the more. "There is a horrible mistake somewhere. What can you do?"

"Do! There is nothing for me to do that I can see. It's a most terrible complication, and the publicity makes it doubly hard to deal with. Of course I'll do all I can to make it easy for her; but, after all, the mistake—if we choose to call it so—has been entirely hers. I think the undoing ought to be hers also, don't you? What could have been her motive?"

Mrs. Duain's reply was indirect: "Then you wouldn't consider letting things stand as they are?" Her tone was wistful.

"Marry her! Why, my dear mother—" Duain checked his amazement at the suggestion, evidently preposterous to him, and went

on more quietly, half smiling: "I confess that solution had not for an instant occurred to me. The affair is befuddling enough for a man of any imagination, but I never cared anything for the girl. Until now I never had any reason whatever to think she cared for me." He blushed as he spoke, then laughed at himself. "I'm sure I don't see why I should blush over it. Annita Andrews was not the kind of girl to stir my blood, as I remember her; but, as I say, it's a befuddling affair."

"She has changed very much," said Mrs. Duain, quickly. "And you didn't dislike her before. You visited there constantly."

"As every one visits everywhere constantly in a little place like this. But none of us were ever in love with Annita Andrews. You know that."

"I don't know why you shouldn't have been," Mrs. Duain replied, warmly.

"Neither do I. But none of us ever were. I don't believe she ever had a lover. For myself, I never cared to be with any girl in my salad days (they seem years back), unless I was sure several other men wanted to get her away from me. I don't think I was a very nice boy. And there was nothing of the siren about Annita Andrews. That at once prevented her be-

ing my type of woman. Why, mother, you know the girl was dry and silent as—not a mouse: mousy women have their attraction—she was more like an oyster. She was monotonous in her very good looks."

"She's more than good-looking. She has a lovely face."

"Oh no, she hasn't, mother dear; you are looking at her now with your own reflection thrown on her. She never had a lovely face at all. It was a handsome and totally blank countenance, and that's all. I've stood on her door-step time and again bored to death at the thought that I knew just how pretty she was going to be when I got in. There's no variety about her. I don't mind a woman being downright ugly, if only she'll look handsome at times. There's some excitement about her then. You can stand on the door-step and wonder whether she's to look a fright or a brilliant beauty. There are girls like that."

"I shouldn't say your salad days were entirely over," said Mrs. Duain, dryly. "You've been dropping very naturally into the present tense."

Duain laughed.

"Well, all the old blood didn't run out on the field, I suppose. I thought it had. But,

you know yourself, if a girl has the looks and the position in life that Annita Andrews had, and still never a lover, there must be something extremely wrong with her."

"No, there is nothing wrong with her," said Mrs. Duain, rising to the challenge. "She was wrong without something, I'll admit. But, Jack, though you may not believe me until you see her again, she's gained that — that something—whatever it was that you missed. How do you remember her?"

"Oh, very well indeed—as a girl who ought to have been extremely beautiful and charming, and who wasn't either in the slightest degree. She missed both by an inch, for some queer reason. She reminded me of an Indian baby, somehow. I always believed she could swim if anybody would throw her into the water; but nobody wanted to take that trouble."

Mrs. Duain's eyes shone; she leaned forward in her chair.

"That's just what has happened. She has been thrown into the water, and she can swim now. You call it swimming; I call it gaining the *sixth sense*. Annita has been here constantly with us, and I have introduced her into the heart of our own little circle of friends. You know what they are—very different from

anything she was accustomed to, and calculated to develop any girl. She has been a great favorite with them, very much admired, and brought out of herself. I can see all the time that she grows more and more attractive; and not to men only."

"Men!" repeated Duain, with a laugh. "Then my widow is not inconsolable."

"She has been carefulness itself," corrected Mrs. Duain, instantly. "I never saw any young woman in her position more delicate or showing more feeling."

Duain looked at his mother, half laughing, half horrified.

"Mother! You are speaking exactly as if she had a real position to maintain and be careful of. Has the girl bewitched you? What do you expect me to do? How can I possibly think anything of the delicacy of a woman who comes to my mother and pretends I am engaged to her after I am supposed to be incapable of contradicting the story? I let you run on because I could hardly collect my own senses before this and think it all over. But I must tell you now, nothing would induce me to marry any woman, no matter what endearing qualities she has since shown, who could have once had the amazing effrontery to claim

me as her promised husband, when I never promised her anything of the kind. I can solemnly swear to you that there was never any engagement whatever between Annita Andrews and me, and I think I can safely add that there never will be."

But Mrs. Duain shook her head slightly, as one not utterly convinced.

"I have seen the girl day in and day out for more than a year now," she said, slowly, "and I have never discovered this indelicacy and effrontery you talk about. She has matured and ripened into lovely womanhood, and she has endeared herself to me—endeared herself very tenderly, Jack—and I tell you plainly it hurts me and makes me indignant to hear you speak of her in this way, exactly as it would to hear one of my own children falsely accused. As you say yourself, you were not a very nice boy. I never thought you were, in those matters, and if you remember, I often told you so. And it's all very easy for you now to speak of yourself as a boy when you went away; but you weren't a boy. You were, or ought to have been, as much a man in a responsible sense as you are to-day, though you were not the fine, developed, self-contained man I see in you now."

The mother's pride rose above all other and newer ties, and perhaps her courage failed a little. "Oh, my dear, I am so proud of you; so proud of your courage, your sufferings, and the way you have risen upon them to be what you are!"

"I am a very unhappy man at the present moment, mother," said Duain, gravely. "Won't you go on and tell me what you mean when you say I was not a nice boy?"

"Those were your own words," said Mrs. Duain, evasively.

"They sounded stronger in my mother's mouth. I know you can't think me capable of having been engaged to Annita Andrews and now denying it to you, but you must be thinking something not very different, unless I entirely misunderstand you."

"I never said she spoke to me of a formal engagement," replied Mrs. Duain, half reluctantly. "I said she confessed to me that you had told her you loved her, and that she loved you."

She bent her eyes on her son's face; but it was not her questioning gaze alone that sent the blood flying up over his forehead. After that first flush and the start that accompanied it, Duain sat quiet, with knitted brows, think-

ing deeply, and evidently self-questioning. He turned a grave face to Mrs. Duain at last, and met her still questioning gaze with a shake of his head and a worried shrug of the shoulders.

"You are entirely right, mother. If I were on the witness-stand to-morrow I could not possibly swear that I never told Annita Andrews I loved her; and the fact that I couldn't swear I hadn't said it as amorously to every other woman with whom I spent a considerable time wouldn't help me, I suppose. When a man's saying good-bye and thinking he may never come back, he says a great deal he would never say under any other less melting and irresponsible conditions. Not that I mean to excuse myself. Do you suppose she could have been so innocent as to take some such foolish trifling in earnest?"

He was speaking whimsically, but there could be no doubt of his sincerity; and when he added, "Of course if that has been the case, there is but one course open to me," Mrs. Duain's courage suddenly and wholly failed her.

Her son was her son, after all, and there is nothing the natural mother craves more for her children than that they shall have whatever they want.

"We know Annita never had any serious lovers to teach her what serious love-making was," she said, "and we know you generally do pretty thoroughly whatever you do at all. But I don't really see that we are called upon to totally sacrifice you to Annita Andrews's ignorance of the amenities that pass between young men and maidens."

Jack Duain sat looking at his mother with amused eyes. She reddened under his look.

"Amenities is a neat word," he said. "No, mother mine, it won't do. You know as well as I all that rings with hollow sophistries. You could hardly get through it. If I said enough to an innocent girl to let her think of herself as my widow all this time, she ought to have the fair chance of being my widow in earnest. If she's grown as attractive as you say, I suppose I can stand it; and it isn't as if I cared for any one else—that I can have."

Mrs. Duain sank slowly back in her chair, her face growing white. Her eyes were full of a frightened consternation, and her lips set in a distressed curve. Her son looked at her and smiled.

"Did you think getting new wounds was a sure cure for old ones, mother?"

"I thought," stammered the unhappy moth-

er—"I thought— Oh, Jack! I don't know what I was about to say I thought. I only wanted to gain time. This is all growing too tragic. I had forgotten all about her. I ought to tell you she is free again. Her husband died not long after you left us."

Jack Duain's face had turned suddenly as white as his mother's. He rose quickly and walked away from her to the window, where he stood looking out. His mother watched him miserably. When he came back to her she tried to read his face, but his quieted expression and manner were impenetrable.

"You never liked her, mother," he said, calmly—"chiefly because she had the shocking taste to prefer a better man to me, I think. I fancy her choice justified itself. But all this is apart just now. We won't speak of it again. I must find out, if I can, how much I am responsible for Annita Andrews's position, and pay what I owe her. That's task enough for the time. I can't arouse her suspicions and—" He laughed as if he could not help himself, not because he was amused.

"How on earth am I to meet her? If I remembered how I parted with her it would be easier, wouldn't it? But there were so many partings, variously harrowing. I am afraid

you and I were right, mother: I was not a nice boy. Isn't this a commentary on me as I was, and a lesson for the bachelor future, if I am to have one? Now, mammy, cheer up. You can't look tragics into this, or dignify my end of it. You have a sense of humor, even if you are my mother. On my side it's only utterly ridiculous. And I am certainly deserving any suffering or deprivations I may get out of it. Any and all—I am not excepting *anything*."

He spoke the last word significantly, and Mrs. Duain understood him.

"And then remember," he added, "I don't intend to accept any consequences that I didn't bring on myself. I shall test that fact somehow, and very thoroughly. I don't know how—but I shall do it. It seems to me now that I am not playing the very ardent lover. Didn't you say Miss Andrews was in the house?"

Mrs. Duain rose with a sigh.

"I suppose I ought to go and prepare Annita for something—I don't know what," she said, with a tearful laugh. "Oh, Jack, isn't all this dreadful? You've just come back to me, and we've done nothing but talk of some one else."

Then they laid their necessarily imperfect

plans. Mrs. Duain was to find Annita, and in half an hour send her to Jack, who would wait for her where he was, alone, and thinking out his best course of action.

"Go say your prayers for me, mammy," said Jack, opening the door for her. "Gettysburg was play to this."

"I don't know what to pray for," returned Mrs. Duain from the doorway, with that touch of naïve humor which nothing could quite subdue. "I don't know what I want for you or anybody else, now. I am so confused."

And then she left him alone.

Confused! If she was confused, it was nothing to his mental state, her son thought, as he tried to decide what line of action he should take. Half an hour became as a thin thread of time between him and the necessity for a decision. In a kind of nervous despair he resolved that he would best economize moments by considering one possibility at a time, and the first episode must be, of course, the meeting. How was he to meet her?

A door at the distant end of the room opened, the curtain before it lifted, and there under the lifted curtain stood Annita Andrews looking in at him.

Duain's first thoughts, passing like lightning

in his brain, were as purposeless and weak as our impulsive thoughts are humiliatingly prone to be. Yes, it was just as he had said. She stood there looking as handsome as he had known she must look, impassive as she always had looked, and the half-hour which he was to have had was unfairly denied to him.

Whether he or she moved first he did not know. He only knew that the curtain fell at last over the door, closing them in together; that they met near the centre of the room, and he was holding her hand as an acquaintance might — as he then felt morally assured he must have held it in their parting — no more, no less. Something outside of himself checked him from going further, and as she spoke he knew it was she that held him back, not his own indecision.

"Then you don't know? They have not told you?"

Her eyes, with a quick glance, had questioned his face before she spoke, and she was already breathing deeply, as if with relief, before his slow reply came in words.

"Told me what?" asked Duain, with that curious reluctance of an honorable man to tell in exact words the lie which he is fully prepared to act to the limit. She seemed to ac-

cept this question as denial, as he meant she should.

"Then I have the chance to tell you myself first—and explain—no, I can't ever hope to explain it."

She was trembling so violently that common humanity alone might have moved him to support her with his arm, but he could only stand motionless and silent, waiting for her to speak further. Her hand still rested in his, but he knew that she left it there for needed support, and for no other reason. He felt himself brutally judicial, thus waiting for her defence. Yet there was nothing else for him to do. As her attitude seemed to ask physical support of him, that he gave her, strongly and kindly, as his nature would have prompted him to give it to any woman. He even shifted his arm a little, so that her weight hung upon his hand more heavily, and he saw that she felt the kindly motion, for her face flushed hotly.

"Don't be kind," she cried, sharply; "you don't know what I have done." Her voice broke off as if it were impossible to say more; but after an effort she went on, in low, rapid tones, which he had to bend his head to hear. "First—may I see you alone, quite alone, for a few moments? I have been hiding in there, in

the next room, like the thief I am. I hoped you would all forget me. I crept in here to see you as soon as I heard them both go. Can you spare me ten minutes now—and alone?" She glanced back again at the door of the room, as if dreading interruption.

"We are quite alone," said Duain, gravely. "No one will interrupt us. What have you to say to me?"

He saw her lips move, but not a word came. Her face flushed from brow to chin; her eyelids lay heavily over her eyes. Duain had not seen her eyes fairly since she entered the room. He looked now at the curved lashes lying on her flushed cheeks, and wondered how it was possible that overwhelming shame could so find expression in two slender lines. Her eyelids fluttered painfully, as if trying vainly to rise. The words came at last with a quick rush; but they came, and the courage of the effort, the set will behind it, appealed powerfully to the young soldier. He remembered Gettysburg again, and thought this girl's white face might have been that of some stripling near him in the last forlorn charge. That silent appeal to his own soldierly instincts was the plea best fitted to soften Duain as a judge.

"I—I am wearing this mourning I have on

for you—and—I have been letting every one think that you were my—my lover—you who never spoke a word of love to me in my life?"

As she ended she drew away from him, as if a spasm of self-scorn gave her strength; but still she could not face him; her face was buried in her shaking hands. Duain stood near her, as confused in mind as before her entrance. His position, though entirely different, was scarcely less intolerable. He felt, and gratefully, that a great weight was shifted from him. He had thought a delicate and difficult task, an almost impossible test of a woman and of himself, lay before him, and now he saw that none of all this was to be. He was fully exonerated. He had, after all, done nothing whatever to be ashamed of; but this shame under which another, and that a woman, cringed before him was almost as distressing to his generous nature. He was helpless to aid her. How could he, of all men, speak to her? What could he say? The burden he had lost was on the proper, if the weaker, shoulders, yet he somehow felt that he himself must have imposed it there. Now that he was in no way bound, he could afford to be generous, and surely there was nothing to hate or turn from in this stricken figure of humiliation hiding an

ashamed woman's face from him. After all, she was a woman, and had proved herself a brave woman; both facts meant much to Jack Duain. He forgot his own wrongs in his pity. That they had played together as children added its argument of mercy, and moved outside of personal feeling he did what was probably the only possible thing to do under the circumstances. With one step he moved back from the awkward present to the past, to the simple manner, even the name, of their childish days of play together.

"Now don't be foolish, Annita," he said, practically; "you never used to be a crying girl. Come, dry your eyes, and let's talk it all over. Upon my honor, I can't see what it's all about, or how any of it happened; but I know you can explain at least some of it. You must know I want to help you—for old sake's sake if nothing else." He drew nearer, and taking her hands as he might have taken Helen's, forced them gently from her face. "What have you been up to?" he asked, kindly and quizzically. "I never have thought of you before as a tricky girl." He looked down at her, smiling, and went yet a step further. "Not that you weren't perfectly welcome to use me as you pleased, alive or dead; but why am I

claimed when dead and so vigorously repudiated when alive? That's what rather offends me."

Then she looked up at him, but only as one too desperately degraded to hide longer. The acute suffering that pinched her features made Duain catch his breath and glance at her again, as the eye is sometimes caught by a look of suffering on a strange face held for a moment eye to eye in the accidental press of a crowded street. Annita had been, in spirit at least, little more than a stranger to him in the casual intimacy of their young past. She seemed to recognize his impulsive sympathy in his glance, and it braced her to self-control.

"I was not crying," she said, with a set quiet. "When a woman is ashamed as I am she doesn't cry. This is all very good of you, Jack, very kind and very like you, but—no, you can't help me. Nobody can. I have done a terrible thing, and I've got to suffer for it all the rest of my life. I don't want to shirk my punishment, but I do want you to know how strong the temptation was, and that I never, of course, never for a moment, dreamed my fraud could involve you. It never occurred to me that you could possibly be alive."

Duain broke in, half laughing, half expostu-

lating: "Are you sorry I am, then? Was that what you were thinking of an old friend as you looked out at me under that umbrella? Why, Annita, this is little less than brutal."

Her eyes lifted reflectingly, and he saw them fully for the first time since their meeting, and saw, too, that he had made one mistake. Either she had never been so near to him in the past, or she had changed from what he remembered, in one respect at least. When she looked up, the whole face was lighted by her eyes. They were serious, thoughtful eyes, deeper and darker than he had recollected them, and extremely beautiful. They looked fully, yet as if unseeingly, into his as she replied, with that direct truth which comes sometimes with distress:

"I don't know. I think I hardly realize that you are really alive. I keep thinking of you as I have for the past year. You seem two people to me, one dead and one alive."

There was the possibility of a confession in her words, and Duain was but human. What lay at the bottom of this mystery he had not yet fathomed, and a not illegitimate curiosity awoke, urging him on.

"How have you been thinking of me for the past year, Annita?" he asked, and then something of softness in his own tone made him

flush uncomfortably and filled him with dismay. As she saw his color rise, hers flooded her face in a blush of womanly resentment, so different from the flush of self-scorn he had seen there when they first met that Duain cried out, aloud, in self-abasement:

"No, no—don't think that. I'm not a conceited ass. I never thought you—that you cared for me at all." And yet he knew that he had been thinking something not very different.

"You mustn't apologize for anything," she said, with the dignity of real humility. "You have a right to think anything of me, but that one thing wouldn't be true. No, I never cared in the least for you in the way you mean. I hadn't even that excuse."

"I didn't consciously mean anything of that sort," corrected Duain, hotly.

He felt it a double grievance that he had let himself harbor such a self-conscious thought, and that it had been detected by Annita Andrews, who had not been too quick to read subtle shadings in the past. He began to feel of her as she had spoken of feeling towards him, as if she were two people—one, the shy, silent girl he had known; and the other, this new and inexplicable woman, palpitating, flushing, and quivering before him, yet always self-controlled.

She went on, with the same quiet dignity, turning away from that side of the subject, and forcing herself to tell the whole of her story, though it could buy her nothing.

"And then, too, I knew that I was only wronging you — the dead, as I thought; by doing this, I knew that—" Her voice sank, she looked down at her hands, twisting her fingers together hesitatingly. "I knew that there was no other woman who might be wronged by it, because—"

Her soft voice broke off, she glanced up at him appealingly, and he finished the sentence for her with gravity and no disguise.

"Because you knew her well, and she told you that I had loved her?"

"Yes." She did not look at him, and spoke in hushed tones, as if intruding on some sanctuary. "You mustn't think she ever told me anything more; you mustn't think that. She only told of the bare fact and her distress that it was so. Did you know—" She looked up again, quickly, and he read plainly her first impulse to be a messenger of new hopes to him, and then the more delicate impulse of present restraint.

"I knew that she was free again," he said, with equal gravity.

This seemed to him also no place or time for discussion of her. But was this the Annita Andrews he had known as utterly devoid of impulses of any kind? His mother had said she was changed, and she was right. Experience had greatly changed and softened her. He caught himself up with an effort, remembering that Annita Andrews had passed through no experience. The dead lover she had stolen, and mourned in pretence, now stood by her in the life, confessedly loving another woman, and to that woman's side she was almost sending him, apparently without a pang, indeed with ill-concealed eagerness. Duain would stand it no longer.

"I know you will think me unkind," he said, abruptly; "I don't mean to be, and I can't feel myself that I am; but we can't go on in this way, Annita. I feel like a man in a dream, and nothing is growing plain to me. I have been very ill, and perhaps that helps to confuse me, but I must ask of you some kind of explanation."

He stooped and took one of her hands between both of his, with kindly reverence, but no gallantry.

"I want to tell you first," he said, earnestly, "that I forgive you here and now everything,

so far as I am concerned, sins confessed and unconfessed. But I do want to understand it all. Do you call that unnatural, Annita? It will be better for us both as things are, it seems to me. Come, sit here and try to remember how long we have known each other—forever. We went to school together, didn't we?" He drew her to a chair as he spoke, and stood by her with his hand on the back of another, as if waiting her permission to sit near her; but seeing that, despite his gentleness, she was again too agitated to take the initiative, he sat opposite to her, now plainly determined to probe the matter to the bottom, yet not unkind in his manner of insistence.

"You haven't left me a chance to flatter myself in any regard, you know," he said, encouragingly. "I begin to see that I was only a kind of peg for you to hang something on, and I want you to tell me what it was."

She looked up at him instantly, with a quick gleam of something like gratification in the dark eyes he found so wonderfully changed and softened.

"That was it," she cried, more naturally than she had spoken. "You have understood it yourself, as I didn't think I should ever be able to make you understand it; but you don't

know, and I can't ever hope to make you know, how much hung on all this for me. You have always had affection, so you can't value it as I did. Every one cared for you. This whole town is mourning for you to-day as when you first—"

"First died," suggested Duain, with a laugh. But it was a laugh that only served to show he was strongly moved. "It's worth having died twice to know that," he added, with feeling.

"Would you be willing to live and suffer all the rest of your life as I must for having had one year of something like it?"

Duain turned sharply from his own emotion and faced the speaker, as if looking at some one never met before. Yet it was the same Annita Andrews. This woman too had monotonous fair hair, and features too regular for what he called beauty. She too was colorless, until she raised her eyes; but those deepened, changing eyes altered and illumined the whole face, and the quivering mouth was as sensitive as a lovely flower. Her low voice, vibrating with passion and womanly longing, fell on Duain's amazed ears, stirring him profoundly. Bewildered, he looked once more for the brown eyes he remembered as shallow and

uninteresting, and again he met something so different, so like a soul's revelation, that his look fell before hers. He remembered suddenly, and with a strange vividness, how as a boy he had once wandered alone into an unlit church, and sat looking at the cold altar, at the rigid chancel outlines, wondering with boyish intolerance at the rapt devotion of those who knelt about him, straying in to drop a prayer before this cold shrine. Then a little door in the chancel had opened, and a white-robed acolyte crept in with a lighted taper in his hand. He touched the tiny flame here and there about the altar, and instantly a soft radiance sprang into life. The rigid outlines grew into mystic holy places. The cold altar had a being of its own, a strange sweet power to call and claim, and, overtaken by the subtle spell of the transformation, the boy's receptive spirit had grown awe-struck and melted. He remembered that he had involuntarily bent his knees for the moment; then, quickly ashamed of this act of worship, so apart from the faith of his own people, he had risen hurriedly and run from the church. This emotion of long ago was what he now recalled, as he saw the soul of a woman rise and light Anita Andrews's eyes. In that moment he knew

what the girl he had known had lacked, and what had been gained by this woman who now was. That indefinable something, that flame of life which he could not name, but without which a woman was no woman to him, had, by some strange alchemy of life, been added to a seemingly sealed nature. The sixth sense of womanhood, his mother had called it, but the name mattered little to Duain. Whatever this gain was, with all its subtle charm and elusive beauty, he knew it was now Annita Andrews's possession, and he felt its power. As his quick imaginative brain worked to this end, Duain knew as instantly that a hitherto unsuspected danger lurked here for him. He was with a woman roused by himself, or at least through him, to a new and bewildering charm and claim of womanhood. In this bare fact lay enough to fire a colder nature, and he knew where his own weakness lay too well to trust himself. As in his boyish rush from the church, so now he felt—safety for him lay in immediate flight. He had stirred in his chair to rise and leave her, when Annita spoke again, and what she said made Duain sink back quickly, with the boyish flush of a self-detected coxcombry again coloring his cheek. Annita seemed either to have forgotten his ex-

istence as a part of the problem, or else she was speaking with deliberate intent to reassure him. Her excitement had gone, and she was again more like herself as he knew her first and best.

"I have never cared at all, not at all, for any man in the world. Perhaps it is because no man in the world ever cared for me. But how would you like to think, and have all your world know, that no one had ever felt it would be a happiness to spend the rest of life with you?"

She turned to him with the first smile of their interview, and for the first time her manner became that of the old childish familiarity, as his to her.

"You never suffered under anything like that. I always wondered why you weren't spoiled, Jack, but you never were conceited about women."

She spoke appreciatively and simply, and with a pretty grace of womanliness far removed from coquetry. Duain felt like hanging his head and confessing how nearly spoiled he had been about to prove himself regarding her. Plainly he need have no fear of capture here.

"Annita," he said, with a little laughing hesitation, "is it true that no man ever spoke a

word of love to you? Are you really so virgin a forest?"

She laughed also, with no offence or embarrassment, but with little mirth.

"If any one had told me a half-hour ago that I could be laughing here with you, I couldn't have believed it. You must have been very kind indeed, and good. I don't seem to be telling you all you wanted me to tell you, but all we are saying is bearing on it more than you know. And perhaps this is the easiest way, after all. No, I have never had a lover, nor a word of real love spoken to me, and I don't remember ever wanting either very much. You can't understand that, can you?"

She glanced at him with a little smile in her deep eyes, and, looking at her again, Duain repeated, with a wonder that was real:

"You never had a lover! But why not?"

Though the passing flame of passion that lit her face was gone, and with it the intensity which had startled him, he knew that he could never again look at her without a stir of memory, without seeing the possibility of that flame again lighting her features, just as the sight of a cold altar still invariably recalled to him the living vision of the one he had seen light to sudden radiance.

"Why not?" he repeated, as she did not reply.

She shook her head, with the same half-smile on her sensitive lips and in her eyes.

"You wouldn't have said 'why not?' a year ago. I have changed in this year. I know it. I see it in the mirror of every one's manner to me; even yours. I can't explain it, but it is so, and—oh, it has been such a happy year! I never wanted lovers, but I always wanted, passionately, to have what I have now. I mean I wanted to be able to attract and to hold people the way other girls did; not to hold men only, but women. You don't know what a shy, unattractive woman suffers, or how lonely it is, shut up in yourself. I was pitifully, desperately lonely. Not a soul ever cared to stay with me. I shall be more than lonely now. That is the price I must pay for one year of this. The price I must pay!"

Her voice broke sharply in a sudden sobbing breath. Her face flushed and her eyes lifted exactly as Duain had seen a sudden physical pang flush the face and lift the bravest eye. She struggled for self-control, but the sob in her throat was followed by another and another. With a cry of helpless distress she broke down and covered her face with her

hands. Duain bent forward and laid his hand on her shoulder.

"Don't cry so, Annita—don't," he said, helplessly. He had thought earlier it would have been easier for him if she had thus broken down. The courage and self-control he had admired had, he felt, hampered him, because it compelled his tolerance; but this was tenfold harder. He had no stand-point left of the past or present from which to comfort her. With a confused impulse which he could not deny and did not stop to analyze, he bent nearer, and, with a quick motion, caught her and held her to him as if defending her.

"There is no price," he said, speaking rapidly. "Why should there be? No one need ever know anything. I don't know all that has happened myself, and you need never tell me. I trust you. I can't help trusting you. There has been some mistake somewhere, and I am willing to abide by it. Are you, Annita?"

She raised her head and stared at him, her tears driven away by her amazement. Though she did not move to withdraw from his arms, he knew it was only because speech and motion were alike paralyzed. He spoke again, with more feeling, as his eyes met hers. "The

price is too heavy for you to bear, far too heavy. There will be none to pay if you marry me, Annita."

"I? Don't you understand anything I have said? There was no mistake. I can't pay too heavy a price for what I did. I went to your own mother and I *lied* to her." She put her hand to her throat as if the words actually choked her, but went on firmly, her face set. "She thought I said you were my lover, and I let her think I did say so, and I let every one think the same. I've stolen all the sweets of a loved woman, reaped all her privileges. You have no reason to pity me, Jack, no reason to sacrifice yourself to me."

Despite the sternness of her effort, she spoke with a simpleness, a sweetness and gratitude, that touched Duain deeply, and the soldier in him stirred again at her courage.

"There would be no sacrifice. I can see that now very plainly, and I could make you happy, I think. If you love me—"

She withdrew from him strongly, taking the leadership for the first time.

"I do not," she said, with spirit—"I do not love you. I thought I made that plain from the first. I tried to make it plain. I had no such excuse as loving you. And while I owe

you a great deal of reparation, you owe me nothing—nothing at all—least of all yourself. Now I beg of you—won't you listen to me a moment? I will try to speak plainly and as shortly as I can, and then go away forever. This talk has been too long already. I came in upon your mother just as she heard of your supposed death, when she was suffering most. I don't know what made me act as I did. I was not apt to do impulsive things then. She must have begun to influence me from that moment. I have never been so influenced by any one as by her. I never shall be again. I cried there with her tears, and I trembled as she trembled, until at last she turned on me suddenly and asked me if—if I had better and deeper reason for such grief than she. And she said it so searchingly, with such clinging caresses, such tenderness, that—I can never explain it—but when I found my voice after the first shock, that did stun me, I could no more bring my tongue to say the word that would separate us than I could have struck her. Oh, you know how lovely she is!—what it means to be loved by her! While I waited—" She paused, the great pain and difficulty of speech returning. "It grew too late. Silence was consent to her. Before I knew it I was in

her arms, on her heart. I have been there ever since. You are her son. You know all it means. At first I tried again and again to tell her, to confess to her, but that first day I was so frightened, so dismayed, at what I had done—I fainted ; and before I could undo anything, she had told, not only dear Helen, but the doctor. You know she is not very secret. And then others knew it—and then—I—I quite gave up trying to alter anything. Sometimes I suffered horribly. I was always afraid, but I was happier than ever in my life. I even let your mother think you had given me this ring — my grandmother's wedding-ring." She flushed deeply as she touched a ring on her hand, and went on less fixedly, more restlessly, flushing and paling by turns. "I don't know why these little lies humiliate me more than the great one, but they do, and that's why I want to tell you of them. I loathed myself each time, but not for long—I was so happy. I had never been with loving people, you know, and somehow every one was at once different to me. Helen told me first of her love-story. I was her lover's confidante all through. No one ever told me anything before. They all seemed to feel that I would understand them because I had loved. And I did understand,

but not for that reason. I could always have understood. It was what I was starving for, though I didn't know it. It was like a beautiful new birth. I never lived at all before this year. I was only a kind of sexless thing. You don't know what being a woman may mean to a woman. I never knew the privileges of real womanhood. I can't discuss or describe them, only they make a wonderful world to itself—and I'm glad—yes, I am glad I have lived in it. I know my way to it was a lie—and such a disgraceful lie!—and it only opened the door to me for one year, but—"

She paused, her tense voice quivering, and shivered slightly, as if in the chill of a reaction. Her words came slowly; her face was so white that Duain, watching her intently, stirred and quivering himself, was frightened at her pallor.

"I can never go back to just what I was. No one will confide in me—or ever respect me again—but I shall still be a woman—a woman, and always ashamed."

She rose and stood. Duain rose also, standing and looking at her as speechless as when they first met. He knew she was right. There was no deeper shame in the world than that of a woman shamed in her own sight and in the sight of other women. Men might for-

give her this fatal mistake—he himself saw her temptation, her great and peculiar gain, ill-gotten though it was, and forgave her freely; but women, he knew, would never again receive her on equal terms. She seemed to have fully realized and faced this fact, and accepted it as her just punishment.

"I think I ought to give these to you," she said, quietly. "Your mother won't want to speak of them or to me when you tell her all I have told you. She has given me some things—treasures to her—that had belonged to you. Here they are. Will you take them to her?"

She drew out from her bosom a thin gold chain that held a miniature painted on ivory, a boyish likeness of Duain. Tied with it was a small gold pencil, which Duain also recognized as one he had always worn on his watch-chain. He still stood watching her, in a kind of horrified dismay, as she detached both tokens from the chain about her neck and laid them on the table near his hand. She seemed to attach no especial force to this part of her confession, though Duain did not move to take the tokens, but waited as before, his eyes intent upon her face. That a few moments back he should have gone so far as to be definitely de-

nied by her had filled him with amazement. He had been conscious of a sense of deep gratitude to her for the generosity of that denial. He had brushed near a danger, and escaped it by no good offices of his own, and yet recognition of the danger escaped could not restrain in him an unaccountable and overpowering desire to right her in his own mind at any risk. Something in the motion of her hand as she laid the tokens down forced a redeeming conviction upon him.

"You do care!" he cried, suddenly and warmly. "You couldn't have worn those on your heart for a year if you hadn't cared for them. It would have been horrible! Don't you see, it would be horrible; worse than all! If you don't care for them, if you don't care for me, why is your hand still lying there by them? Why don't you turn them aside as if they were common things."

If he could have recalled the hasty words he would have done so almost as they were spoken, for she lifted her hand with a start, as if the tokens scorched her, and laid it on her heart. It was no motion of melodrama. He could see her suffering, see her breast heaving under her palm as she pressed it down, as though trying to hold her body quiet by force while

she thought. Her dark eyes began to stare at him pitifully, growing wider as with fright. At last, trembling and weak, she made one faltering step to fly, but her strength failed, and, with a little moaning cry of helplessness, she sank on her knees by the table, dragging the tokens desperately towards her, and hiding her face with them in her arms.

Duain stood looking down at what he had done, aghast and frightened. He dared not touch her or speak to her. He could interpret her emotion but one way, and he, and he alone, had done this much at least. But for him she would have gone out of his life quietly, and it might have been unconsciously as to her heart's secret. He had betrayed her to herself and before him.

How long he stood looking down at the motionless figure he never knew. If it were moments or if it were hours that framed his resolution he could not have told. He only knew at last that he blindly followed a struggling impulse, stronger than he dared resist, when he knelt down by her side and touched her hair softly, rousing her.

"Annita," he asked, gently, "was I right? You do care?"

She raised the whitest face, the most wretch-

ed eyes, he had ever seen. Emotion seemed exhausted in her, but his heart beat fast and thick as he again saw her face lit with the repressed passion of despair, but even so lit again to a beauty that caught his breath. It was more than the siren charm he had demanded of all women in his past. It was the charm of a delicate womanhood matured by living, suffering, sinning perhaps, but growing always into something finer, more uplifted, more forceful and possessive of life—like the wind-flower that in the spring sends up its pure frail blossoms to be swayed by every wind of the earth, while below are the vivid, time-colored leaves of last summer's growth. She had changed as he now knew he had changed, both watered by tears of blood, but she had put forth delicate blossoms under that wintry rain.

Had he?

Another face rose before him—the sweet siren face that had gayly ruled his youth and haunted his soldier days, and with the rising vision a great tumult began for him, a great inward dismay and distress. Strive as he might, the light of that sweet, long-loved face was only as the petty candles of a gay booth by the deeper lights, the altarlike radiance,

the white passion, of this despairing face, to which he had turned, he believed, only in pity and generous compassion. Was this new sense of reverence his blossom of new growth?

He stood speechless, and she pushed the tokens from her, not looking again at them or at him.

"Oh, why did you teach me this? Wasn't my punishment enough? I might never have known!"

"You must have known it sooner or later; and isn't it better to think that you were not playing a part all this year? Haven't you less shame, knowing that?"

"Yes," she answered. She rose, refusing his aid. "Yes, it is less ugly this way, and I don't suppose I shall suffer much more than I must have suffered."

Again she paused, and again the low voice, deep with the effort of speech, painfully sweet with feeling, stirred his heart bewilderingly.

"I would rather have you know that I never wore those on—on my heart until I felt a real tenderness for them. I thought I felt it because we talked of you so constantly, and I thought it was only a vague hero-worship. Oh, why should I try to make you understand, when I don't understand myself! I only

know that I never, never for one instant, wore them thinking of you as alive, or associated any such feeling with you as a living man, until— Oh, believe that much, won't you?"

She lifted her hand, which had fallen to the table, and without that support stood unsteadily.

"I don't think I can talk any more, just yet. If you could get me to my room without seeing any one, and then—home. I want a place to hide. When I am a little stronger I will write to Mrs. Duain. I can never see your mother again."

Her mouth quivered with the last words.

"You will see her often," said Duain, gravely. He went on slowly, as if feeling for words, or letting that same sure, slow-moving impulse prompt him:

"This can't end so, Annita. Don't you see it is impossible? Can I forget you after this? Can you forget me? When I spoke before it was under excitement. I know I only half meant it. But now—if you love me—*as* you love me—"

"Don't!" she cried, throwing out her hands and shrinking back. "I can't stand this. Not your pity—it stung before, and now—"

She stood trembling from head to foot be-

fore him, and with a quick motion he took her strongly, almost by force, into his arms. He drew her head upon his breast, holding it where he could look down on her face. In it, in the deep, startled eyes, in the quivering question of her sensitive mouth, in the exquisite flush of her unbelief, he seemed to be reading the key to his own conduct, his own assured impulse—explicable only in that moment to himself.

"But now—" he repeated slowly, almost as if thinking aloud. "No, no, this is not pity—not pity at all. It is reverence—love."