

A MERE MAN

I



THE Clubs were full, and busy with gossip. The new beauty (an American) had been presented to a royal prince, and the old beauty of three seasons ago was engaged to be married, engaged to an eligible man too, a certain Leonard Standish, whose father came of a good old stock, and had left him a pretty place in Yorkshire, and a decent amount of money. A young man of twenty-eight, a favourite on the race-course and in London drawing-rooms, with a handsome face, and a simple, unaffected manner, a reputation not too bad, and a record cleaner than most men's; a man his own sex liked, and dubbed a "damned good fellow," and the other sex considered straight and honourable, he was up to date in all but his immorality, and the little there had been of that was decidedly behind the times.

The girl was a tall slim creature, with an aristocratic face, thin, delicate, pink lips, large, brilliant gray eyes, a thin nose, a well-shaped chin, and pretty, well-groomed hair. Her father, a Major in the Guards, was dead. Her mother was a well-known woman about town. Her brothers were equally divided between the Stock Exchange and the Army, and their friends were nice young men with squeaky voices.

She knew London well, had wearied of balls after her first season, had taken an interest in racing the second, and in Leonard Standish the third. During the ball-room epidemic she had been engaged to young Charlton, in the Guards, and had thrown him over at the last minute because he bored her. During the racing epidemic she had been engaged to Bernard Chitty, who had suddenly disappeared to Africa, and society talked with little result. Her third year was crowned with success. The royal prince had wearied of her, it is true, but she was engaged elsewhere, and her mother, her relations, and her friends were pouring congratulations from every quarter.

She was to be married in April, and was busy discussing a proposed visit to Paris in search of chiffons on a cold dreary February afternoon, as her

carriage drove down Park Lane, while her mother waxed fretful because a hand-glass reflected a somewhat reddened nose.

"My dear Aimée," Mrs. Bentley Cardross was saying, as she dabbed a minute powder-puff all over her face, "it's so very tiresome. You haven't noticed, I'm sure. The tip of my nose has been quite frost-bitten, and is reviving in a peculiarly painful manner. Do sympathize, dear."

Her daughter did not reply.

"So annoying that man never sending my new cloak home. I'm frozen, dear, frozen, I assure you."

The girl glanced at her quickly, and looked away again.

"You seem covered with fur," she remarked.

"Have you seen Leonard to-day, dear?" inquired Mrs. Bentley Cardross, with a nervous smile.

"No."

"He was going——"

"I don't know where he was going. He is coming to dinner to-night."

"Of course, dear, of course."

"I've asked Mrs. Sharpe."

"My dear girl, do you think you are quite wise? She is not *quite* all I could wish; and Leonard is so dreadfully particular."

"She is my friend."

"I know, of course, I know; but her husband is so very racy, and always smells of the stables; and she will smoke before dinner is half over, and I know Leonard will look at her with that tiresomely grave face which always makes me wish to shake him. After you are married——"

"That odious phrase! Let us leave that time to the future, mamma."

"Very well, dear, if you like. I am sure I am quite busy enough to find plenty to say about the present. But Mrs. Sharpe wants to flirt with every man she meets. She will look up at Leonard, with those pathetic eyes of hers, until she drives me mad."

"Of course she looks pathetic. Her husband is a perfect brute to her."

"Oh, no doubt!"

"And unless she nags on at him for about an hour, he won't even allow her to dine with us."

"How unjust."

"And if she is just a little late in coming home, he goes and gets drunk."

"My dear, you shock me."

The daughter smiled.

"Do I, mamma?" she inquired; and then she leaned forward, and waved her hand to a man in a passing hansom.

"Who was it, dear?" cried her mother. "Do tell me."

"Only Leonard. Who can he be going to see in Park Lane? That horrid stiff Lady Jane Graham, I suppose. Perhaps she was a friend of his mother's."

"My dear! She's only thirty-seven."

"And looks more."

"Well, Aimée, as a well-preserved woman myself, I never scoff at those who are stupid enough to show their years. They are usually religious people, and go often to the holy communion, and that's so tiring,—the kneeling I mean; if you once get down it's so difficult to get up again, at my age. Don't you think so?"

"I didn't hear what you were saying. Is it worth repeating again?"

Her mother flushed crimson, and took up the hand-glass with a shaking hand.

"No, dear, no," she said, timidly. "Of course not."

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Lady Jane Graham was at home, and would see Mr. Leonard Standish.

She was a tall woman, with a graceful face, a graceful figure, and a manner that was her chief charm. As she rose, with a smile, to welcome him, her deep voice had a peaceful sound, and her eyes a look which reminded him somehow of a church, and there was a faint scent somewhere, suggestive of incense.

"How are you?" she began. "I am very glad to see you. Come and sit near the fire and tell me all your news. Harold has gone down to Langham, and I had that pretty little May Egerton staying with me for a few days. They are repairing the village church, and Harold bought a new horse, which he wants you to see. That is all my news in one breath. Aren't you relieved?"

He took a tea-cup from her hand, and smiled. A few seconds were devoted to his questions about her husband, her friends, and to her answers. She was a woman whose whole household is always of interest to her acquaintances, and Leonard Standish had a closer claim than that. He had been a staunch friend to her brother, a handsome young scapegrace, who slept in a foreign grave.

She read people cleverly, and described them aptly. She was a woman who clung to old-fashioned ideas, and conventional thought. She had a kind

heart, and a sensitive nature, under a masked dignity which seemed like pride.

"You are to be married in April," she said.

"Yes, in April—the seventeenth."

"Have you settled where you will go afterwards?"

"Lord Arthur said he would lend us his place in Suffolk. Aimée knows him very well. He seems a nice kind of chap. I was at Eton with him."

"And your house—have you settled on it?"

"Yes, it's in Cadogan Square." There was a pause, Leonard Standish put his hand up to his dark hair, and smoothed it.

Lady Jane feigned not to watch him, and touched some lilies of the valley in a vase near with long, shapely fingers. She knew well that he had something to say to her, and she knew also that she would prefer him not to say it. There was only one course open to her, however, to be patient and sympathetic, and to listen to him when he chose to speak.

"I met that young Captain Cardross the other night. He is a handsome boy."

"Yes," his future brother-in-law admitted. "But I wish he didn't try so hard to be smart."

"Isn't that the fault of the age? And youth reflects the age."

"I think I like Jack Cardross best."

"He's on the Stock Exchange, isn't he?"

"Yes. He's an awfully sharp fellow. Gets on very well. Is rather too full of scandal, though. That sort of promiscuous soiling of characters makes me sick."

"I only met him once," Lady Jane said gravely; "and I fancy that his words are bigger than his deeds. He is probably more harmless than he likes to be thought. I should distrust the captain more."

"Would you. How funny! But then you always have queer ideas about people, and you are always right."

Lady Jane smiled.

"Have some more tea," she said; "and tell me what you know of a Mrs. Sharpe."

"Oh! she's a friend of Aimée's. A pretty little woman. I met her at Sandown."

"I saw her once at a theatre. Harold knew her husband slightly; he is a racing man I fancy."

There was a pause.

"You didn't like Mrs. Sharpe," Standish blurted out.

"No, not much."

"I say, Lady Jane," he began, "I am in an awful fix, and I want to ask you something. You won't mind, will you?"

"Do you think I am the right person to ask?"

"I'm sure of it. The fact is, I couldn't question anyone else. It would seem so disloyal."

"My dear Leonard, it is so foolish to ask a friend anything. The only things worth knowing we all find out for ourselves."

"I don't think I understand," the man answered. "I'm awfully worried and bothered, and I thought you'd help me."

"Well, tell me what it is."

"People are saying beastly things——"

"People?"

"Well, one woman."

"Oh! Go on."

"About some one I love very much—a great friend of mine—a woman I respect. I say, Lady Jane, you must guess, you know. It was about Aimée."

"Was the authority good?"

"Good! How do you mean?"

"Was the woman who said the things reliable?"

"No, not very, I should think. It didn't strike me before."

"Had she any motive for wishing to destroy your belief in Miss Cardross?"

"Motive? Women always think there must be a motive at the root of everything."

Lady Jane laughed. "Because there usually is. But you haven't answered my question."

"Oh, well, I don't know. She used rather to like me, perhaps. A man feels such a cad when he says a thing like that."

"Not to me," said his friend, not from vanity, but to reassure him. "Well, then, if she spoke from jealousy, I think we may dismiss the matter."

"You don't think it's true."

"If she was the only maligner——"

"Oh, there it is! I've heard other people long ago hint—about—about all sorts of things."

"That is rather vague if you want me to dispute them."

"I do. That's just it. I want you to tell me that Aimée is all right. A

nice, good girl, as nice as she is beautiful. I'm really awfully fond of her. I can't tell you how fond. I never felt so strongly about anything before. She is so lovely, and so sweet, and I like to hear her talk: she's awfully clever too. I don't know what I should do if I believed all those horrid things."

Lady Jane blushed. She had a trick of flushing pink when anything distressed her. Her glance fell on the picture of a grave on a distant table, and she remembered her brother as he had looked years before the end. If he had been alive, he could have spoken where her mouth was sealed. She could not take the responsibility of settling Leonard's whole future for him in that way. And she could not ruin a young girl's chances of happiness by a word or sign.

"What do you want me to say?" she asked.

"Tell me if you know anything."

"I know"—she slightly and conscientiously emphasized the word "know"—"I know nothing against Miss Cardross. Rumour has dealt with her as it deals with every woman celebrated for her beauty—that is, unjustly, always. It overpraises her outward appearance, and depreciates her soul. It claims the right to attack her character, as it cannot attack her face. Had I a child,"—her voice altered—"had I been lucky enough to have a child, and she a girl, I should have wished her any curse but beauty, and any misery but brains. If a beautiful woman is attacked and smiles, a clever one is ten times more abused, and she doesn't smile—she is usually wretchedly alive to all that is said, and miserably sensitive about it. Why, Leonard, you cannot possess a pearl without the world deigning to envy you. It is the fate of all lucky men."

"Yes, of course, I am awfully lucky."

"Don't let spiteful women frighten you, or reckless men startle you. They mean only half of what they hint, and a quarter of what they say. A man's gossip is usually the most harmless thing in the world. He tells a scandalous story because it is naughtily amusing, not to ruin a woman's reputation, and he speaks lightly of a good name, because he has lost his own so long ago that he has forgotten the value of it."

Leonard Standish turned a puzzled face towards his hostess.

"I suppose I've bored you terribly," he said.

"Certainly not."

"You—you don't think me a cad for coming to ask you such questions."

"I have never known you do anything that could possibly earn you that obnoxious title."

"But, Lady Jane, will you let me tell you exactly what I did hear, so that you won't think I was worried over a mere nothing, a mere breath of scandal."

"My dear Leonard, I don't want to know. I can trust you not to have mentioned those rumours without reason, and such mud has a nasty trick of sticking to one's mind, and I want never to be reminded of anything but good of your wife. Take care that none of the mud clings on to you."

"You are quite right. Quite right. I can't thank you enough."

"Where are you dining to-night—not with Lady Ralston, I fear."

"No, are you going there? I am dining with Mrs. Cardross. I haven't seen Aimée to-day—at least not to speak to. I passed her, as I was driving here, looking awfully pretty. Her mother was there too."

"Her mother." Lady Jane flushed pink. "I don't know Mrs. Cardross."

"She's—she's awfully good-natured."

"Yes, I heard she was."

"Rather careless, you know, but devoted to her children. The boys really do know an awful set of men. I met Dottie Leighton, and Freddie Williams with them at the Empire the other night. You don't know them, of course."

"Only by sight. You mean some pretty boys who are always in the Park on Sunday. They look harmless enough, as if all their time were spent in choosing a necktie to match their eyes."

Leonard Standish rose to go. He seized Lady Jane's long fingers impulsively. "You've been awfully good to me," he said, "I can't thank you half enough. I'm not a bit worried now."

She smiled a little sadly.

"Come and see me again soon, Leonard," she said, "and bring Miss Cardross with you."

"Of course I will, she will love to come, I know. Good-bye."

Lady Jane stood and listened to his hansom wheels as he drove away. A dark, foggy evening was closing in, and she went to the window and looked out. His cab was a mere speck in the mist, the street lights twinkled uneasily through the smoke, and the roar of London was muffled to her ears.

"I wonder," she thought, "if I have done wrong that good may come." And the smoke, and the fog, and the darkness closed round the lucky man.

II

One warm Sunday morning in May, when the park was bright with lilac and laburnum and the pink blossom of the chestnut trees, a small group of people

were congregated near the Achilles statue. A slight breeze toyed with the lace veil of one of the women, and the large black feathers in the other's hat. The men were mostly young, and unmistakably smart. One of them was biting the end of a prayer book, absently, forgetting that he carried it for Mrs. Lionel Boyne, whose large rebellious veil claimed all her attention for the moment.

"Yes, the Standish *ménage* has returned," Mrs. Sharpe was saying, "I saw her yesterday, she says they had a splendid time in Paris. I asked no questions about Lord Arthur's place, it must have been deadly dull. Fancy my being buried in the country with Bob. I should commit suicide after one day. And I'm sure Bob's the most good-natured creature in the world."

"Dear lady," cried Dottie Leighton, quickly, "don't mention suicide, it's so nasty."

"Besides we couldn't spare you," said a heavy Colonel, with a smile. He liked the pathetic eyes to be raised slowly and pleadingly towards his own, and Mrs. Sharpe's gentle affected manner pleased him.

Mrs. Boyne overheard and turned round. "I never can remember how I spent the honeymoon with Lionel, I suppose I bored him to death. I know he bored me. Isn't that Dolly Marker over there, the new burlesque dancer, that people are so mad about, and it's Bernard Chitty with her? What a joke!"

The ladies both laughed, Dottie laughed, the powdered and red-lipped Freddie Williams became convulsed with merriment. Colonel Ashby alone failed to see the joke, and wondered what the devil they all meant.

"Aimée doesn't know he is in England," said Mrs. Sharpe.

"Does anyone know the truth of that story?" asked Mrs. Boyne.

"I suppose Bernard found out something," suggested Mrs. Sharpe.

"What do you mean?" a fourth man inquired, abruptly.

"Oh, I really don't know, Mr. Franklin," said the lady in a hurry. "I am devoted to Aimée myself, and think her husband is a dear—so fond of her, too—it is quite charming to see them together."

"Talk of an angel," said Franklin, going forward, "and here she is. We were just discussing your domestic bliss, Mrs. Standish."

The girl looked her best, she had a becoming pink colour, and wore a Paris costume. Leonard Standish had a face which smiled on all the world, and if ever a man expressed contentment, he did, with his clear fresh voice and his bright smile.

"It was so awfully nice in Paris," he explained to Mrs. Sharpe; "we went

everywhere, and saw everything. We heard Guilbert sing, and did all the theatres, and gave some jolly little dinners at Voisin's, and chez Paillard. You ought to get Bob to take you over for a few days. Paris is lovely just now."

"Oh, Bob never will take me anywhere, the old idiot is far too mad on racing."

Mrs. Boyne rustled up to Aimée. "Dearest," she said, in a shrill voice, "have you seen Dolly Marker and the latest victim? It is such a joke, as he is a newly married man."

"Who is? and where are they?"

"Over there under those hawthorn trees." Mrs. Standish put up a lorgnette. It dropped suddenly, and the glass and tortoise-shell broke in twenty pieces on the gravel.

"Dear lady! How dreadful!" cried Freddie Williams. "I must get you a new one."

"I'll send you one from Paris," said Dottie.

"What made you drop it?" asked her husband.

Her cold face chilled him, as she said with an almost imperceptible sneer, "Carelessness, I suppose, but I really don't know."

Mrs. Sharpe looked pensive, Mrs. Boyne smiled.

Later, Aimée said suddenly, "When, and where did Bernard marry?"

"Oh, in Australia," Franklin replied. "He picked up a piece of gold, rubbed the dust off, and has brought it home to be polished. She's a large woman with auburn hair. She's his only mistake."

"Where is your husband, Mrs. Boyne?" asked the girl.

"He's lost just at present. He's awfully clever at losing himself, you know."

Mrs. Sharpe turned round with her pensive smile, and raised eyebrows.

"M' dear," she said, clipping her words, and looking reproachful, "don't speak of the poor man like that. Perhaps he wants to be found."

"If you would like to go and hunt for Bob," proposed her friend, "I daresay he's somewhere in the park."

"Dear Bob," sighed Mrs. Sharp, "I wonder if he is."

"I wish I were a woman, and newly married," cried Mr. Williams. "It must be so nice wearing all one's new frocks."

"Oh, you naughty thing," Mrs. Sharpe said, and then laughed.

"Did Standish take you to the Moulin Rouge?" inquired Freddie.

Her husband turned round.

"Come home now, Aimée," he said. "We shall be late for lunch."

"All right, Leonard;" she drew him a little aside. "You don't mind, do you—I've asked Dottie and Freddie to lunch?"

"Not those brutes, have you?"

"Yes, why not?"

"Oh, very well, only it's the last time."

"The first, you mean. I shall invite whom I please."

"Not to my house, while I'm in it."

"Then you can go out, dear. I can't waste any more time now. Come on, Dottie, we're off now."

The rest of the party watched them crossing the row.

"She's a lovely woman!" Colonel Ashby exclaimed.

"She's thoroughly smart," agreed the two women.

"Her husband," Franklin said slowly, "is the best chap I know. I only hope she'll treat him decently. He will cut up rough if she plays any of her old games, poor fellow."

"You didn't let me talk like that about Aimée, and now you've done it yourself."

"My dear Mrs. Bob, you hinted at something before those two boys, which means that all London will know who said it to-morrow, that is all. The Standish husband and wife have quite enough before them, without our adding to their troubles. No good ever came out of the Cardross family yet, and I don't believe it ever will. Come and dine at the Savoy with me to-night and I'll tell you some naughty stories. We won't ask Bob."

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One warm June day, a month later, Leonard Standish went into his wife's room directly after breakfast. The window was wide open, and above the geraniums and mignonette in the flower-box he saw a perfect blue sky, and brilliant sunshine.

"What a jolly day!" he exclaimed, "I say, Aimée, are you ill?"

His glance fell on some brandy and seltzer in a tumbler on the dressing-table.

"Yes," she admitted fretfully. "Dreadfully seedy, dear. Don't worry."

"Then why on earth do you go out?"

"How absurd you are. I've promised to go shopping with Ada Sharpe and there is Hurlingham this afternoon."

"Oh, yes, I forgot. Shall I come back and take you there?"

His wife shook the powder-puff all over his coat-sleeve, and then drew a dark line under each eye.

"No need, dear," she remarked, and then seeing his face reflected behind her own in the mirror, she added quickly, "I am going with the Chittys."

"You are always with those people," Leonard said.

"I thought you liked her," his wife retorted.

"Well, I do like her—why not? I like that sort of fresh woman, with her big honest face, and auburn hair. There is something straight about her which is very rare."

"She's a damned good fellow, in fact," laughed Aimée.

"What beastly language you use. I say, don't drink all that B. and S. It's an awfully stiff one."

Her eyes danced with fun over the rim of the glass.

"You silly boy," she said, "it won't hurt me. Do you think I've got a head like mamma?"

"Your mother can stand a good deal," said Leonard, stiffly.

"I sent Mary down for ten minutes, and she's been an hour. Ring for her, will you?"

"No, not for a second. I want to talk to you. I say, Aimée, really I wish you wouldn't go about with the Chittys so much. He's one of a horrid set of men, and although she's an awfully nice woman, she isn't quite a lady. It does you such harm with decent people."

"You are always grumbling at my friends. Pass me that rouge, dear, will you?"

"Oh, don't, you've got an awfully pretty colour of your own. Let the nasty stuff alone." Leonard Standish touched his wife's hair timidly, and added very gently, "I like you as you are, Aimée, darling, not messed up with all that stuff."

She shook his hand off. "Don't be silly," she remarked, "you know you don't mind it really."

He look puzzled. "I don't in other women," he admitted, "but somehow I hate it in my wife."

"I must get on with my dressing, and you hinder me. If you haven't anything else to say, you'd better go."

Her husband went half across the room, and then returned.

"Can you come and call on Lady Jane, to-morrow?" he asked, "we've never been near her since our marriage, and she came here three weeks ago, when we were out."

"I can't bother, she bores me to death. You can go, and say I'm ill. I say, Leonard, come back, and don't look so cross. I'll look in on you in the smoking-room before I go out. I have something to tell you—no, not now—later on. Ring the bell, there's a dear, and leave me alone."

He heard her rustling down the staircase half an hour later, he heard her greeting to Mrs. Sharpe in the hall, and her quick "wait for me in the morning-room one minute, dear," and then she turned the handle of his own den and entered.

She looked pretty and distinguished, and a little flushed. With a shyness new to them both she came and kissed him, and holding on to the lappels of his coat, she said, faintly, with nervous lips:

"Dr. Bell came in yesterday, Leonard, and he said that I—that I—I mean I thought you would like to know—that you would be glad, dear."

Leonard Standish sprang to his feet. "Why, darling," he cried, "do you mean——?"

She broke from him, crimson, and breathless.

"Oh don't, Leonard, don't, you know quite well what I mean. Now I shall be late if I don't go—and you've knocked my hat crooked." She laughed nervously, and rushed from the room.

The man sat down before his writing-table, and his lips twitched. Her few shy words had changed the whole world, and the little annoyances of the last month vanished. He thought that he would go and see Lady Jane, and as his wife did not intend returning till dinner time, he telegraphed to Lady Jane to know if he might lunch with her, and received an answer in the affirmative.

The day wore on, and a hot sun streamed into her cosy drawing-room and shone on her serene features, and on his happy careless face. It shone on Mrs. Standish during her drive down to Hurlingham, and watched her relentlessly when once there. The timid Australian wife tried to hide her large figure behind the slim girl. Bernard Chitty bent his ironical face close to Mrs. Standish, and whispered comments on their mutual friends, which made her laugh. Freddie, and Dottie, and Mr. Boyne gathered round her, and took her to have some champagne, and made her feel her costume was a success. Her laughter grew noisy, her speech more careless. They suggested a dinner at Hurlingham, and a music hall to follow, which necessitated no change of dress, and then supper in a private room at the Berkeley as a finish to the day. Mrs. Standish assented to it all, and rather late in the afternoon remembered her husband and sent him a wire.

He was in the dining-room when it came, fuming inwardly, and eating an over-cooked dinner. He read that she was staying at Hurlingham to dine, and was somewhat appeased. But it somehow seemed a bad ending to the day, which had been a happy one for him.

He drove down to one of the theatres after dinner, and met Franklin in the lobby.

"What have you been doing?" he asked carelessly, as they both turned towards the stalls.

"Oh! I went to Hurlingham. Rather good match on. I saw your wife there."

"Yes, she has stayed to dine."

"Oh!" Franklin looked at him curiously.

They separated with a careless "see you later," and Leonard sat through the play.

In coming out into the Strand he saw a woman in rags, emerging from the door of a public house, and he stopped in the act of getting into his hansom to throw her half-a-crown. The baby she clutched to her breast had attracted his notice, but he felt half ashamed of the deed.

When he returned, he learnt to his surprise that his wife had not yet come home. He changed his coat for a smoking-jacket and lit a cigar.

Twelve o'clock struck, and he hummed an air from the piece he had seen, and opened some letters on the writing-table. His wife's tobacco bill was nearly as large as his own; he flung it down with an oath, and settled himself in an armchair.

One o'clock struck, and he felt uneasy, and wandered in an aimless manner all over the house. Then he returned, and flinging himself into the chair again, fell asleep.

He woke with a start; some one fell over something in the hall and roused him. He went quickly from the room. The clock faced him, it was three o'clock.

"Why, Aimée!" he said, "how late you are."

She didn't answer. She stood leaning against the hall table, with her eyes on the ground.

"Aimée," he repeated, "what's the matter?"

She raised her face.

"Noth—in," she replied.

He recoiled and turned sick with horror.

"Charming evening—so tired—go sh—sleep—all right."

His face had turned to the colour of chalk. He went up to her and took her arm.

"Come along to bed," he said, almost roughly.

She shook his hand off and laughed.

The man felt afraid of his own disgust.

She seemed to pull herself together suddenly.

"Come 'long, Leonard, bed-time," she said, and made a lurch towards the stairs.

He offered her his arm, she clutched it, and together they ascended, slowly. He helped her to undress, and put her to bed. He woke later from a troubled sleep, with the sun streaming into the room, to find her crying weakly. He took her into his arms, and she laid her cheek against his. The misery of that bright morning remained with him to the end of his days. Neither put the horror into words, they only clung to each other like two shipwrecked people, and through such misery and degradation their marriage tie seemed sanctified.

After that, in a furtive manner, he tried to stop her taking spirits, and she, in a furtive manner also, resented the fact, and defied him.

He never went near Lady Jane again; the misery he bore was all his own, and had to be suffered alone.

Almost imperceptibly his wife changed; she lost her sense of what was refined and pure, and her coarse jokes went the round of the clubs. She started card-parties, and resumed her interest in racing. She took no care of her health, and was recklessly defiant of his wishes. This state of things lasted till the end of July, when they had settled to go north.

Mrs. Bentley Cardross, Mrs. Sharpe and her husband, Mr. and Mrs. Boyne, Colonel Ashby, Franklin, and the Chittys, were to be of the party. The house in Yorkshire was put in readiness for the twelfth, and Captain Cardross asked leave to bring two men friends to join them for the shooting. Leonard Standish looked forward to the moors and the out-of-doors existence with relief. His wife admitted that she felt dreadfully tired and ill, and would be glad of the rest. He felt more hopeful once away from London, and the familiar house and park seemed to welcome him home.

The Australian woman went out shooting, and became a general favourite. Her freckled face, brown eyes, and short auburn curls, were considered almost attractive. She had a brusque manner, a large heart, and the dignity of a savage queen. Her husband neglected her shamefully, but she did not appear to notice it, and most of the women were a little

afraid of her purity of thought. They could not speak so openly in her presence.

Colonel Ashby was making a pitiable figure of himself while dancing attendance on Mrs. Sharpe. Mrs. Boyne flirted with Captain Cardross, and, as Aimée said, "She had found a nice old man for dear Mamma." Mrs. Bentley Cardross was, as usual, frivolous and undignified, and always smelt of sherry. She was terrified of her daughter, who bullied her; she managed to be a great nuisance to her son-in-law.

Meanwhile Leonard's affection for his wife had in no wise abated. Her weakness needed all the more pitying protection, and all that was best in the man seemed to come out during those few months. Where he had been careless and selfish, as men are trained to be from mere babyhood, he grew considerate and kind. He shielded her, as if she had been a rebellious child, from the consequences of her own misdeeds. Franklin swore under his breath, and marvelled; the other men thought him a fool.

Then things went from bad to worse suddenly, and he determined to speak to her, as he had never spoken to any woman in his life.

She was lying on a sofa in her boudoir, resting, and smoking one of his cigars. He went in, feeling all that he had to face, and his voice would not sound clear and natural.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Leonard?" she said. "Do shut that door. Damn the draught, it's blown this ash all over my teagown. What do you want?"

"I want to speak to you, darling. It's awfully hard, and I feel a brute—you can't tell what a brute I feel—but I know I shall be to blame if I don't get it over. I say, Aimée, I wish you would be more careful than you are."

She flushed crimson, and she trembled so much that she dropped the cigar; he knelt to pick it up, and remained on the ground beside her couch.

"You won't mind, darling, will you?" he pleaded. "I know it isn't your fault. There are some things your mother didn't teach you—perhaps she couldn't. I'm not a bit angry; I'm only sorry, and I want to help you. Won't you let me, dear?"

Her face went white under the rouge, and her eyelids dropped.

"Make it easy for me, darling, because you know what I mean. Let us aid each other. I don't blame you one bit—I only want you to trust me to help you—let us fight this thing together, and conquer it. Do let's try, darling for both our sakes."

She raised herself on one elbow.

"I don't know what you mean," she said, defiantly.

He gave a cry which might have touched her, for it wrung his own heart, and he answered hurriedly,

"I don't want you to take so much champagne. Oh, why did you force me to say it—why did you?"

She burst into tears, and fell back, and wound her arm round his neck, and every word of her defence made him wince as if with shame.

"I know," she cried, "don't speak of it, pet. It is wrong and stupid of me, of course. I get so tired—and overstrung—and so faint. I won't do it again, I promise you. I will let you help me—I will be very good. Only you know, Leonard, it isn't my fault—I am really ill and—I need something."

He gathered her in his arms, and, in an agony which she never understood, he said, tenderly,

"Don't let us talk of it again. I know you don't mean it—I believe in you, dear. And we—we will fight it together. Oh, my darling, for the sake of the little child God is going to give us, try—let us both try—to be brave, and conquer it."

She held his head against her breast, as if it gave her strength, and she cried in short gasps, terrible to hear.

The afternoon sun waned, and shed a dim light over them both, as they clasped each other close, and whispered in soft abrupt murmurs, with hearts full of tender anguish, of the child which was to come.

III

Leonard Standish sat alone in his room. The snow lay thick on the ground, and the trees were white with frost. There was an awning over the steps of a house at the other side of the square, where the occupants were preparing to give a dance, and a barrel-organ started a well-known music-hall air somewhere at the end of the street. Upstairs a child cried faintly, and was hushed again. In his own room the fire burned brightly, and the scent of cigar-smoke was heavy in the warm curtains. He sat brooding alone, and not even the thought of his little son had power to console him.

Aimée was out, she had gone out against his wishes, she disregarded them in everything now, and the house felt lonely.

It was nearly a year since his wedding day, nearly a year since he had gone to ask Lady Jane those questions. He had shirked seeing her of late; her gray eyes had a trick of reading the truth, and he had now something to hide.

His boyish face was changing ; his very manner had become troubled and restless ; he had lost control somehow in his own house, and the fact continually fretted him and worried him.

He thought perhaps it would be best if he went away for a little time ; and then the child above began to cry again. He rose impatiently and flung away his cigar ; then he went upstairs and knocked at the nursery door.

“ I may come in, nurse, mayn't I ? ” he said.

“ Why, of course, sir.”

He stepped into the room, and the woman stopped in her walk, and held up his child.

“ There's Papa, duckie,” she cried. “ Look at Papa.”

He would have felt a fool if his wife or anyone else had been there ; as it was, the tiny red face, and the minute fingers clutching his own, made his throat feel dry, and his voice shake.

“ I say, you're an awfully rum little thing,” he remarked.

The baby, dimpled and blue-eyed, began to laugh ; the nurse made it dance till its father's head felt giddy, and ashamed, but comforted in a strange inexplicable way, he crept out of the nursery and drove away to his club.

When he returned from the club half an hour before dinner, he found his wife in her room, with the child on the bed.

“ Well, Aimée,” he cried briskly, “ did you have a nice afternoon ? ”

“ Yes—all right. I say, Leonard.” She turned a radiant face from the glass. “ Isn't he a darling ? ”

The child somehow always drew them nearer. She went to the pillow and bent over it, with a face that was softened and beautiful. Her husband drew near, too.

“ He is a nice little chap,” he admitted.

“ I adore him,” she cried, burying her lips in the baby's soft cheek. “ There never was such a baby in all the world. I think I should die if we lost him.”

“ He's not ill, is he ? ”

“ No, you idiot, quite well and healthy. Aren't you, my angel ? Leonard, you have got to kiss him, too.”

He put his arm round his wife and drew her near him, first. She pushed him laughingly away. His face flushed.

She had been kissing her baby with a breath that was perfumed with brandy. The discovery turned him sick.

“ Embrace your son,” she cried.

"I—I think I'll take him back to the nursery," he stammered. "I shan't drop him, you know. And if you don't get on with your dressing, you'll be late for dinner. You—you don't mind, do you, darling?"

"Oh, no. I can't bother with him any more. Take him to nurse, and then go and get dressed yourself. The Chittys are coming, and I wired to ask Mr. Franklin, so do be ready in good time."

"I didn't know you had asked anyone," Leonard said, slightly annoyed, and then, with a quick suspicion of more to follow, he added, "That's all, I hope?"

"No, Mrs. Sharpe and Freddie may look in after dinner. Freddie was going to dine with her to-night."

"But I thought I told you, Aimée,"—he tried his hardest to keep calm,— "that I wouldn't have that man in the house. I am weary of him and his whole set, and I begin to believe Bernard is as bad as the rest—anyhow, I draw the line at Williams, do you hear?"

"I have no time to waste now, Leonard, and the Chittys will be here in a quarter of an hour. Do go and dress. We can discuss these things afterwards."

"Aimée,——" her husband began, and then he stopped and carried the child from the room.

He dressed hurriedly, with a nervous sense of trouble to come. She, on the contrary, drew out her diamonds at her leisure, and aided her maid to arrange some stars in her hair.

The scent of the dinner reached Leonard, and the front-door bell rang. He seized a handkerchief and stuffed it up his cuff, while he ran downstairs, Franklin met him at the drawing-room door.

"Glad to see you, Franklin," he cried. "Come in. My wife will be down in a minute."

His face had a queer, drawn look, and his lips were curiously white.

"Cold knocked you up?" asked his friend.

"No. Beastly day, isn't it? Boyne seemed in a nice fix. Blend wouldn't lend him any more. I never knew before that the wife had the money."

"Oh, he has quite a decent amount of his own."

There was a pause.

"What rotten cigars those were that Arthur gave us the other night. Did you try them?"

"I never smoke Arthur's cigars."

Mrs. Standish came into the room, and Franklin rose.

"How are you?" She looked her best, and her husband recognized her

beauty with a stab of pain. "So glad you could come, Mr. Franklin. I knew you wouldn't mind a wire in a hurry. I only discovered the Chittys were disengaged this morning. Leonard, just fasten this bracelet for me."

She peeped at her reflection in a mirror over the fireplace. "Do you like this frock, Mr. Franklin? It's new."

He smiled. "I'm not much of a judge," he answered. "You always look charming."

"Tiresome man, when I put it on just for you." She sat down near him, and the astute Franklin thought, "She wants to conciliate me for some reason; must have had a row with her husband, that would account for his face—poor devil!"

Just at that moment the Chittys arrived, and dinner being announced at the same time, they all went downstairs.

Leonard was unusually silent, the Australian unusually grave. In contrast with these two, Franklin was witty and amusing, Bernard malicious and ironical, Aimée recklessly gay.

Leonard, when he did speak, talked at random; the coming inevitable contest with his wife occupied all his thoughts. Thus it was that, coming out of his abstraction, he caught himself studying Bernard Chitty as if he saw him for the first time, and noted the man's black hair, keen dark eyes, and cruel mouth, with a start of surprise. He had a curiously sleek personality, and a tongue whose utterances cut like a knife. Franklin's expression was that of a man of the world, and therefore boasted no taint of innocence, but it was fresh and honest beside his, and to this man Aimée bent her pretty head and listened and laughed, while she drank her champagne as if it had been water, and flashed a look of defiance at her husband.

The Australian lifted an olive in her large fingers, and held it up to the light.

"The right kind," she remarked carelessly, "the Italian curved stone. I dislike those large Spanish things saturated with oil. What is this," she drawled for a moment, "what is this about our going to the Covent Garden Ball? Are you thinking of it, Mr. Standish?"

"Certainly not," answered Leonard, promptly, when his wife interposed.

"Oh, yes, you are," she said; "I forgot to tell you, Leonard. Ada wants me to make one of her party. Are you invited, Mr. Franklin?"

There was an uncomfortable pause, then Franklin answered slowly:

"I have not that good fortune."

"Oh, but Aimée," her husband said, "I don't think you can go. I hate

that sort of thing. I know people do it now, but unless I took you myself, I shouldn't care about it for you."

She turned an expressionless face in his direction.

"Ask for some Benedictine, please, Leonard," she said; "I can't eat this sweet without some liqueur. I forgot you prefer Crème de Menthe, don't you, Mrs. Chitty?"

"No, thank you. Neither for me."

"We will stay down here and smoke," Aimée, continued. "Bernard, I have some mild cigars which you must persuade your wife to try. Freddie was telling me to-day that Reggie Graham is Dolly Marker's latest edition, is it true?"

Franklin smiled. "Graham is always being some one's latest edition," he said, "I should say there will be no impression left to print, soon."

"What relation is he—give me a light, Bernard—what relation to Lady Jane Graham?"

"None at all," said Leonard sharply.

"Oh, really, I am surprised! I always thought he was her cousin. Mrs. Chitty, my husband has been so dreadfully dull all dinner time, that I am sure you must have had a very stupid evening, I'm so sorry."

The Australian looked her straight in the face. "Mr. Standish never bores me," she said; "I may have seemed uninteresting to him."

Leonard flushed crimson, and turned to answer her in a low, troubled voice. Franklin intended to say something and refrained. Mrs. Standish was pouring brandy into her coffee with an unsteady hand.

When the ladies had left them, the men lingered for a few minutes, and then followed upstairs. Mrs. Sharpe was standing near the fire, warming a shapely foot. Freddie Williams had taken his place at the piano, and was warbling a ditty of illicit love. Aimée lolled in an armchair, the Australian bolt upright on a distant sofa, with a white face, and the lamplight full on her pretty hair. Franklin took a seat beside her, and for a time it seemed as if they were merely spectators of a play.

The ballad finished, Freddie discoursed of a new French novel, called "M. le Mari," and Aimée laughed at his description, immoderately. Mrs. Sharpe took Leonard aside to tease him into consenting to the proposed party for the ball, and Bernard sat silently intent on Mrs. Standish and her laughter.

Franklin left early, pleading another engagement. Freddie found a footstool and placed it at Aimée's feet, where he sat for the whole of the evening. The rest gathered round, and the conversation grew sultry.

Leonard talked to Mrs. Chitty at random, and she answered composedly, with no pity for the tragedy she guessed at, and no interest, merely a forced smile, and impassive manner.

At length the evening came to an end, and the husband and wife were alone. She hurried up to him with an excited laugh, and said thickly :

“What the devil made you so damned glum all the evening? Do you want all the world to know that you are in a beastly temper?”

“We will talk of this another time,” he answered.

“No, we won’t. I want to speak of it now. What do you mean?”

“I mean that you are tired and excited. We will return to this in the morning.”

She went to the spirit stand and poured out a glass of water from a jug near. She drank it slowly, and then returned to the fire. Her manner was suddenly more composed.

“We’ll have it out now, please, Leonard,” she said. “I mean to ask anyone I like here.”

“And I forbid you to ask Williams into the house again ; nor do I intend that you shall see so much of Mrs. Sharpe. I dislike her and all her set.”

“Her set!” she mimicked him. “Does that include the Chittys?”

“Yes, it does.”

There was a dangerous light in her eyes.

“You disapprove of Bernard, for that wife of his can’t count.”

“I disapprove, and refuse to give countenance to your flirtation with him—yes. I have been stupidly blind for a long time, but I’ll be blind no more. Mrs. Sharpe has circulated her nasty stories for the last time here. Williams has sung his beastly songs for the last time in my house, and I won’t have Chitty hanging about you. You will please give in to my wishes, for I can’t stand it, and I won’t, Aimée, any more.”

The servants had gone to bed, and the house was so quiet that they could hear the tick of the hall clock downstairs. The brilliantly lighted room showed Leonard Standish pacing it with a white face and rigid lips, and the light shone on his wife’s pink cheeks and brilliant eyes as she lay back in the armchair and clenched her little fists.

“It’s not the first time I’ve spoken. I asked you to give up Ada long ago.” He went as far as the door and back again, his troubled eyes in little keeping with the firmness of his mouth. “I suppose you’ll say I’ve lost my temper,” he continued. “I daresay I have. But it’s the first time I’ve lost it with you, anyway.”

She was thinking deeply, and barely noticed that he spoke.

"I don't want to be horrid to you, Aimée, but you made me mad to-night, and I know that if I don't insist on being obeyed now, my weakness will be criminal. I want to help you, not to ruin you, as so many men do their wives, by foolish complaisance. You must get out of this beastly set, and get out of it at once."

He drew aside the window curtains and looked out at the night. The moon shone on the snow, and changed even the London square into something almost poetical and beautiful. He turned back again.

"I ought to have been more careful of you," he said. "We should have begun better. I don't blame you wholly, it was my fault too. Aimée—Aimée, have you nothing to say?"

She rose with a set face, and went towards the door. He sprang forward and caught her arm.

"Come back, child. Don't go away like this, surely you know that finding fault with you nearly breaks my heart. Aimée, darling, do listen to me. I'm stupid at explaining things, I know, but I'll try, if you'll be patient, and I'm sure you'll see it's right to do what I want, in the end."

"Look here, Leonard," she said, slowly, "you are a fool to waste your breath. Your suspicions of Bernard insult me, just as your suspicions of the rest insult my friends. I don't want to talk about it any more, I'm going to bed."

He drew back, as if he had been struck; her face, hardened and white, looked at his own. She went back to the table, and poured out some brandy, which she carried upstairs in her hand.

He followed a few minutes later, and found she had locked the door.

The night seemed long, and the dawn came slowly. He lay on the smoking-room sofa and tried to think, but consecutive thought would not come. Directly the servants were astir, he changed his clothes, and went and had a Turkish bath. He felt half afraid to go home.

IV

Mrs. Standish was out, his man told him when he returned home, and he seemed wishful to add to the fact, or at least to be questioned on the subject, but Leonard passed him, and went upstairs. He met her maid coming down.

Mrs. Standish had gone to spend the evening with Mrs. Sharpe, and had given her leave to go out.

Leonard nodded, with no sign of surprise, and changed his clothes for a smoking suit.

Before going down to dinner, he peeped in at the nursery. The boy lay sleeping peacefully in his little crib, with one small fist buried in his cheek.

Mrs. Standish had come in and kissed him before she went out, the nurse said, and might have added, how she had cried, but did not dare.

He found some paper and scribbled a hasty note in pencil, begging her not to give people a chance to talk, and asking her to return for their child's sake. He sent it round to Mrs. Sharpe's by his own man, and told him to wait if needful till they returned home from the theatre (should they be out), and not to come back without an answer.

Then he took a cigar and strolled into the smoking-room, where he read for some time.

To do so needed some self-control, as he was miserably restless.

Eleven struck. He threw the paper away, and sat down at his writing table. He wrote half-a-dozen notes which had been neglected, and then idly began tracing patterns on the blotting pad. The phantoms had returned, the air of Freddie's latest song rang in his ears, and he remembered with a start another evening when he had waited for her, and she had come back from Hurlingham—as she had often done since.

Twelve, and his man at last.

"Mrs. Sharpe gave me this note, sir. She had been at the theatre. I waited till she came in, as you told me."

"And your mistress?"

"I didn't see her, sir. Is that all, sir?"

"Yes, you can go to bed."

He hurriedly tore open the envelope. His own, unopened, fell out. On an added piece of paper, in Ada Sharpe's bold handwriting, were the words.

"DEAR MR. STANDISH,

"Aimée isn't here. There must be some mistake. I haven't seen her since last night. I hope there is nothing wrong.

"Sincerely yours,

"ADA SHARPE."

He turned so sick at heart, that for a time he sat like a statue, with no movement, and no colour in his face; he scarcely thought.

Then, very slowly, with a foreknowledge of what he was to find there, he went up to her room.

It lay on the dressing table, the white sheet of paper telling him that she had gone. With a cry of agony, he flung himself on the bed which they had shared, and buried his face in the pillows.

And the child started crying in the room above as if it knew that its little life was desolate indeed.

* * * * *

The next morning found Leonard standing outside the Chittys' door. He was told that Mrs. Chitty would see him, and he went upstairs. They were in curious contrast, he so pale and shaken, she so calm and unmoved.

"I suppose you—you've heard," he said.

"Yes."

"I came to ask you if I can be of any use?"

"No thank you—none."

He looked at her brown eyes, with their womanly softness, and marvelled.

"I suppose you will institute proceedings for a divorce," he said.

The room was manly, like herself, and devoid of any useless luxury. She rose and went towards the fireplace, and her neat dress showed her superb figure to good advantage.

"The truth is, Mr. Standish," she said, "we are companions merely in misfortune, and I think we are better apart. You are powerless to aid me, and I—I regret it—am powerless to comfort you. You will probably get a divorce—it is the only thing for you to do—but I shall not."

"Not!" he stammered.

She smiled, and he realized that there was something more powerful in that smile than in any other expression of her face.

"You may as well have the facts. Bernard has a hundred a year of his own. The rest of the money is mine. Had your wife any money?"

"None—but her settlements."

"I thought so. Well, in a short time I expect him home."

"But you can't mean that you will receive him?"

The Australian laughed. "Not exactly with open arms, Mr. Standish, but I shall receive him all the same. I have no relations in Australia, and no real friends in England. I have no choice. But I don't appeal to your pity," she added quickly, "I appeal to no one's pity."

Leonard rose.

"I suppose you think my visit an intrusion, Mrs. Chitty?" he said.

The light fell full on his boyish face, altered and drawn with misery. The Australian flushed crimson, and said in a voice that was full of a woman's caressing tenderness :

"You are one of those men who should never have had this to bear. I believe you would be good to a woman, and patient with her. I thought you weak, but I fancy you were only blind. Will you shake hands and say you forgive me?"

He did not quite understand, but he knew there was something quaintly motherly in her action which amused him while it touched him.

"Of course, I'll shake hands," he said. "And if you ever happen to want aid in any little way, you'll send for me, won't you?"

She hesitated, and then she said :

"Yes, if I ever do, I will. Good-bye."

Leonard found there was a lady waiting to see him when he got home. The day reminded him of the time after the funeral of his mother, years ago. It was crowded with events, and yet none of them mattered.

He went upstairs like a man who was very weary, and pushed open the drawing-room door.

Lady Jane came towards him with outstretched hands.

"Leonard, my poor boy!" she said.

The words arrested him, and he felt a queer choking sensation in his throat.

"I say—don't—don't make me be a fool," he cried, "don't, please."

She drew back, and put a handkerchief to her lips.

"I can't forgive myself," she said. "Oh, if only I hadn't been such a coward. How you must hate me."

He stared at her, with a curious smile touching his lips.

"What on earth do you mean?"

"That day when you came to me, oh, if only I had spoken out!"

"Then you *did* know something," he said.

"I knew nothing for certain, but I had heard rumours, yes. Oh, Leonard, what must you think? And I might have saved you all this."

The smile deepened.

"My dear Lady Jane, it really doesn't matter; nothing matters now. How did you hear about—her?"

"Mr. Franklin came round this morning. It seems Mr. Leighton met them at the station—he was seeing some friends off by the same train. I hardly know Mr. Franklin, but he seemed much worried over the whole thing,

and begged me to come and see you. He said, a man felt such a useless brute at such a time."

"That's so like Franklin," Leonard said. "He's one of the best chaps I know."

"We were going down to Folkestone to-morrow, I have taken a house there——"

He interrupted: "I forgot you had been ill. Are you better?"

"Oh, yes, thank you. But I want—and Harold wants—you to come to us. It will make me feel you forgive me, and we shall be quite quiet down there. It—it would be good for you to get away from London, and good for the child."

He started, and then laid his head down on his elbow on the mantelpiece.

"I will take great care of him, Leonard. Although I've never had a child, I know how to manage them well. You can trust him to my care."

He didn't answer.

"Any business you have to arrange can be done down there. We can talk it over together, we three."

He looked up suddenly.

"I—I am such a coward of the future," he said.

"Did you sleep last night?"

"No—nor the night before."

"I thought not. Now I'm going to take possession of you. Ring that bell near you, and give orders that the nurse is to be ready to go home with me in an hour—you must sleep in my house to-night."

"There is so much to do."

"Leave it to others. I insist on your giving in to me. Will you be with us by dinner-time?"

"Yes, anything you like."

By-and-by he left her, and crept away upstairs, and shut himself into the bedroom.

The house was to be let, and he intended to leave his man behind to arrange everything. It seemed years since last night.

He pulled open the drawers, the masses of white under-linen, sweetly scented, met his view. He seized them in his arms, and bundled them into a large trunk. Then he went on to the gloves and handkerchiefs, the dainty silk petticoats, and the tiny boots and shoes. He came to the wardrobe in its turn, and fingered the soft dresses with a tender touch. In this, she had gone to the Paris races a year ago; in this, she had driven beside him on the Yorkshire

moors ; and, lastly, he came upon a box full of sheeny satin, and his hands shook as he lifted it—her pretty wedding dress, with its trimming of old lace—and laid it among the others in the trunk.

He pulled a second box forward, and commenced filling that. The writing-table, a dainty Louis Quinze table, a wedding present, he came to in time. He broke it open, and carried the drawer full of papers to the fire he had caused to be lighted an hour before. In piling the letters on to the flames, he caught sight of one in Bernard's writing, and swore. He cursed himself for a fool, and rescued the rest. These might be useful in an action for divorce.

There were fourteen in all. He put them into a large envelope, and sealed it.

The day wore on. A few hours later he emerged, gave some orders, had his own portmanteau placed on a hansom, and drove away.

He entered Lady Jane's drawing-room, and greeted Harold, as he had entered and greeted them all his life.

There was no difference in him at dinner. He asked once after their young niece, May Egerton, and added, that she was the prettiest girl he had ever known ; and turned crimson when he had said it, remembering whom he had admired more. He affected not to notice that Lady Jane's eyes were miserably red, or that her manner, in her keen self-reproach, had changed towards himself. Left alone with her husband, the few short words on the subject they exchanged merely put discussion off till another time. He met the nurse in leaving the dining-room, and asked her carelessly if the child was all right.

"Yes, sir," she faltered, in her timid pity for him. "He's sleeping beautiful. I'm just going down to have my supper, sir."

"Thank you," he said, abruptly, and went upstairs.

"Where's Leonard?" asked Lady Jane, as her husband entered the drawing-room alone.

"He's gone upstairs—I fancy, to see the boy. And I hope to God it will thoroughly upset him. The man's calm may be natural, but it's horrid to watch."

Lady Jane put her head down on her hands.

"Don't, don't," her husband pleaded, "he has the kid, you know, after all."

And he said it as only a childless man could have said it, as his weeping wife knew.

A NEW WRITER.