

'I have never been here before,' said Lucy, dreading somehow the sound of her own voice; 'but my husband is well acquainted with the family.'

She was pleased with her own phrase, and began to recover herself. The lady said no more, however, but leant back and apparently went to sleep. The tall ladies presently did the same. Lucy's depression returned as the silence lasted. She supposed that it was aristocratic not to talk to people till you had been introduced to them. She hoped she would be introduced when they reached Benet's Park. Otherwise it would be awkward staying in the same house.

Then she fell into a dream, imagining herself with a maid—ordering her about deliciously—saying to the handsome footman, 'My maid has my wraps'—and then with the next jolt of the carriage waking up to the humdrum and unwelcome reality. And David might be as rich as anybody! Familiar resentments and cravings stirred in her, and her drive became even less of a pleasure than before. As for David, he spent the whole of it in lively conversation with the small dark man, beside the window.

The carriage paused a moment. Then great gates were swung back and in they sped, the horses stepping out smartly now that they were within scent of home. There was a darkness as of thick and lofty trees, then dim opening stretches of park; lastly a huge house, mirage-like in the distance, with rows of lighted windows, a crackling of crisp gravel, the sound of the drag, and a pomp of opening doors.

'Shall I take your bag, Madam?' said a magnificent person, bending towards Lucy, as, clinging to her possession, she followed the lady in green into the outer hall.

'Oh no, thank you! at least, shall I find it again?' said the frightened Lucy, looking in front of her at the vast hall, with its tall lamps and statues and innumerable doors.

'It shall be sent upstairs for you, Madam,' said the magnificent person gravely, and, as Lucy thought, severely.

She submitted, and looked round for David. Oh, where was he?

'This is a fine hall, isn't it?' said the lady in green beside her. 'Bad period—but good of its kind. What on earth do they spoil it for with those shocking modern portraits?'

Such assurance—combined with such garments—in such a house—it was nothing short of a miracle!

CHAPTER III

'Now, Lavinia, do be kind to young Mrs. Grieve. She is evidently as shy as she can be.'

So spoke Lord Driffield, with some annoyance in his voice, as he looked into his wife's room after dressing for dinner.

'I suppose she can amuse herself like other people,' said Lady

Driffield. She was standing by the fire warming a satin-shoed foot. 'I have told Williams to leave all the houses open to-morrow. And there's church, and the pictures. The Danbys and the rest of us are going over to Lady Herbart's for tea.'

A cloud came over Lord Driffield's face. He made some impatient exclamation, which was muffled by his white beard and moustache, and walked back to his own room.

Meanwhile Lucy, in another corridor of the great house, was standing before a long glass, looking herself up and down in a tumult of excitement and anxiety.

She had just passed through a formidable hour! In a great gallery, with polished floor, and hung with portraits of ancestral Driffields, the party from the station had found Lady Driffield, with five or six other people, who seemed to be already staying in the house. Though the butler had preceded them, no names but those of Lady Venetia Danby and Miss Danby had been announced; and when Lady Driffield, a tall effective-looking woman with a cold eye and an expressionless voice, said a short 'How do you do?' and extended a few fingers to David and his wife, no names were mentioned, and Lucy felt a sudden depressing conviction that no names were needed. To the mistress of the house they were just two nonentities, to whom she was to give bed and board for two nights to gratify her husband's whims; whether their insignificant name happened to be Grieve, or Tompkins, or Johnson, mattered nothing.

So Lucy had sat down in a subdued state of mind, and was handed tea by a servant, while the Danbys—Colonel Danby, after his smoke in the dog-cart, following close on the heels of his wife and daughter—mixed with the group round the tea-table, and much chatter, combined with a free use of Christian names, liberal petting of Lady Driffield's Pomeranian, and an account by Miss Danby of an accident to herself in the hunting-field, filled up a half-hour which to one person, at least, had the qualities of a nightmare. David was talking to the lady in green—to whom, by the way, Lady Driffield had been distinctly civil. Once he came over to relieve Lucy from a waterproof which was on her knee, and to get her some bread and butter. But otherwise no one took any notice of her, and she fell into a nervous terror lest she should upset her cup, or drop her teaspoon, or scatter her crumbs on the floor.

Then at last Lord Driffield, who had been absent on some country business, which his soul loathed, had come in, and with the cordiality, nay, affection of his greeting to David, and the kindness of his notice of herself, little Lucy's spirits had risen at a bound. She felt instinctively that a protector had arrived, and even the formidable procession upstairs in the wake of Lady Driffield, when the moment at last arrived for showing the guests to their rooms, had passed off safely, Lucy throwing out an agitated 'Thank you!' when Lady Driffield had even gone so far as to open a door with her own bediamonded hand, which had

Mrs. Grieve's plebeian appellations written in full upon the card attached to it.

And now? Was the dress nice? Would it do? Unluckily, since Lucy's rise in the social scale which had marked the last few years, the sureness of her original taste in dress had somewhat deserted her. Her natural instinct was for trimness and closeness; but of late her ideals had been somewhat confused by a new and more important dressmaker with 'aesthetic' notions, who had been recommended to her by the good-natured and artistic wife of one of the College professors. Under the guidance of this expert, she had chosen a 'Watteau *sacque*' from a fashion-plate, not quite daring, little tradesman's daughter as she felt herself at bottom, to venture on the undisguised low neck and short sleeves of ordinary fashionable dress.

She said fretfully to herself that she could see nothing in this vast room. More and more candles did she light with a trembling hand, trusting devoutly that no one would come in and discover her with such an extravagant illumination. Then she tried each of the two long glasses of the room in turn. Her courage mounted. It was pretty. The terra-cotta shade was *exquisite*, and no one could tell that the satin was cotton-backed. The flowing sleeves and the pleat from the shoulder gave her dignity, she was certain; and she had done her hair beautifully. She wished David would come in and see! But his room was across a little landing, which, indeed, seemed to be all their own, for it was shut off from the passage they had entered from by an outer door. There was, however, more than one door opening on to the landing, and Lucy was so much afraid of her surroundings that she preferred to wait till he came.

Meanwhile—what a bedroom! Why, it was more gorgeous than any drawing-room she had ever entered. Every article of furniture was of old marqueterie, adapted to modern uses, the appointments of the writing-table were of solid silver—Lucy had eagerly ascertained the fact by looking at the 'marks'—and as for the *towels*, she simply could not have imagined that such things were made. Her little soul was in a whirl of envy, admiration, pride. What tales she would have to tell Dora when they got home!

'Are you ready?' said David, opening the door. 'I believe I hear people going downstairs.'

He came in arrayed in the new dress suit which became him as well as anything else; for he had a natural dignity which absorbed and surmounted any novelty of circumstance or setting, and was purely a matter of character, depending upon a mind familiar with large interests and launched towards ideal aims. He might be silent, melancholy, impracticable, but never meanly self-conscious. It had rarely occurred to anyone to pity or condescend to David Grieve.

Lucy looked at him with uneasy pride. Then she glanced back at her own reflection in the glass.

'What do you think of it?' she asked him, eagerly. 'Magnificent!' said David, with all the sincerity of ignorance—wishing, moreover, to make his wife pleased with herself. 'But oughtn't you to have gloves instead of those things?'

He pointed doubtfully to the mittens on her arms.

'Oh, David, don't say that!' cried Lucy, in despair. 'Miss Helby said these were the right things. It's to be like an old picture, don't you understand? And I haven't got any gloves but those I came in. Oh, don't be so disagreeable!'

She looked ready to cry. Poor David hastened to declare that Miss Helby must be right, and that it was all very nice. Then they blew out the candles and ventured forth.

'Lord Driffield says that Canon Aylwin is coming,' said David, examining some Hollar engravings on the wall of the staircase as they descended, 'and the Dean of Bradford, who is staying with him. I shall be glad to see Canon Aylwin.'

His face took a pleased meditative look. He was thinking of Canon Aylwin's last volume of essays—of their fine scholarship, their delicate, unique qualities of style. As for Lucy, it seemed to her that all the principalities and powers of this world were somehow arraying themselves against her in that terrible drawing-room they were so soon to enter. She set her teeth, held up her head, and on they went.

Presently they found themselves approaching a glass door, which opened into the central hall. Beyond it was a crowd of figures and a buzz of talk, and at the door stood a tall person in black with white gloves, holding a silver tray, from which he presented David with a button-hole. Then, with a manner at once suave and impersonal, he held open the door, and the husband and wife passed through.

'Ah, my dear Grieve,' said Lord Driffield, laying his hand on David's shoulder, 'come here and be introduced to Canon Aylwin. I am delighted to have caught him for you.'

So David was swept away to the other side of the room, and Lucy was left forlorn and stranded. It seemed to her an immense party; there were at least eight or ten fresh faces beyond those she had seen already. And just as she was looking for a seat into which she might slip and hide herself, Lady Venetia Danby, who was standing near, playing with a huge feather fan and talking to a handsome young man, turned round by chance and, seeing the figure in the bright-coloured 'Watteau *sacque*,' involuntarily put up her eyeglass to look at it. Instantly Lucy, conscious of the eyeglass, and looking hurriedly round on the people near, was certain that the pleat from the shoulder and the mittens were irretrievably wrong and conspicuous, and that she had betrayed herself at once by her dress as an ignoramus and an outsider. Worst of all, the lady in green was in a *sacque* too!—a shapeless yellow thing of the most untutored and detestable make. Mittens also! drawn laboriously over the hands and arms of an Amazon. Lucy glanced at Miss Danby beside her, then at a

beautiful woman in pale pink across the room—at their slim waists, the careless *aplomb* and grace with which the costly stuffs and gleaming jewels were worn, and the white necks displayed—and sank into a chair trembling and miserable. That the only person to keep her in countenance should be that particular person—that they two should thus fall into a class together, by themselves, cut off from all the rest—it was too much! Then, by a quick reaction, some of her natural obstinacy returned upon her. She held herself erect, and looked steadily round the room.

‘Mr. Edwardes—Mrs. Grieve,’ said Lady Driffield’s impassive voice, speaking, as it seemed to Lucy, from a great height, as the tall figure swept past her to introductions more important.

A young man bowed to Lucy, looked at her for a moment, then, pulling his fair moustache, turned away to speak to Miss Danby, who, in the absence of more stimulating suitors for her smiles, was graciously pleased to bestow a few of them on Lord Driffield’s new agent.

‘Whom are we waiting for?’ said Miss Danby, looking round her, and slightly glancing at Lucy.

‘Only the Dean, I believe,’ said Mr. Edwardes, with a smile. ‘I never knew Dean Manley less than half an hour late in *this* house.’

A cold shiver ran through Lucy. Then they—she and David—had been all but the last, had all but kept the whole of this portentous gathering waiting for them.

In the midst of her new tremor the glass doors were again thrown open, and in walked the Dean—a short, plain man, with a mirthful eye, a substantial person, and legs which became his knee-breeches.

‘Thirty-five minutes, Dean!’ said the handsome youth, who had been talking to Lady Venetia, as he held up his watch.

‘It is a remarkable fact, Reggie,’ said the Dean, laying his hand on the lad’s shoulder, ‘that your watch has gained persistently ever since I was first acquainted with you. Ah, well, keep it ahead, my boy. A diplomatist must be egged on somehow.’

‘I thought the one condition of success in that trade was the patience to do nothing,’ said a charming voice. ‘Don’t interfere with Reggie’s prospects, Dean.’

‘Has he got any?’ said the Dean, maliciously. ‘My dear Mrs. Wellesdon, you are a “sight for sair een.”’

And he pressed the new-comer’s hand between both his own, surveying her the while with a fatherly affection and admiration.

Lucy looked up, a curious envy at her heart. She saw the beautiful lady in pink, who had come across the room to greet the Dean. *Was she beautiful?* Lucy hurriedly asked herself. Perhaps not, in point of feature, but she held her head so nobly, her colour was so subtle and lovely, her eye so speaking, and her mouth so sweet, she carried about with her a preëminence so natural and human, that beauty was in truth the only word that

fitted her. Now, as the Dean passed on from her to some one else, she glanced down at the little figure in terra-cotta satin, and, with a kindly diffident expression, she sat down and began to talk to Lucy. Marcia Wellesdon was a sorceress, and could win whatever hearts she pleased. In a few moments she so soothed Lucy’s nervousness that she even beguiled from her some bright and natural talk about the journey and the house, and Lucy was rapidly beginning to be happy, when the signal for dinner was given, and a general move began.

At dinner Mr. Edwardes bestowed his conversation for a decent space of time—say, during the soup and fish—upon Mrs. Grieve. Lucy, once more ill at ease, tried eagerly to propitiate him by asking innumerable questions about the family, and the pictures, and the estate, it being at once evident that he had an intimate knowledge of all three. But as the family, the pictures, and the estate were always with him, so to speak, made, indeed, a burden which his shoulders had some difficulty in carrying, the attractions of this vein of talk palled on the young agent—who was himself a scion of good family, with his own social ambitions—before long. He decided that Mrs. Grieve was pure middle-class, not at all accustomed to dine in halls of pride, and much agitated by her surroundings. The type did not interest him. She seemed to be asking him to help her out of the mire, and as one does not go into society to be benevolent but to be amused, by the time the first *entrée* was well in he had edged his chair round, and was in animated talk with pretty little Lady Alice Findlay, the daughter of the hook-nosed Lord-Lieutenant of the county, who was seated at Lady Driffield’s right hand. Lucy noticed the immediate difference in tone, the easy variety of topic, compared with her own sense of difficulty, and her heart swelled with bitterness.

Then, to her horror, she saw that, from inattention and ignorance of what might be expected, she had allowed the servants to fill every single wineglass of the four standing at her right—positively every one. Sherry, claret, hock, champagne—she was provided with them all. She cast a hurried and guilty eye round the table. Save for champagne, each lady’s glasses stood immaculately empty, and when Lucy came back to her own collection she could bear it no longer.

‘Mr. Edwardes!’ she said hastily, leaning over towards him. The young man turned abruptly. ‘Yes,’ he said, looking at her in some surprise.

‘Oh, Mr. Edwardes! can you ask some one to take these wine-glasses away? I didn’t want any, and it looks so—so—dreadful!’

The agent thought that Mrs. Grieve was going to cry. As for himself, his eye twinkled, and he had great difficulty to restrain a burst of laughter. He called a footman near, and Lucy was soon relieved of her fourfold incubus.

‘Oh, but you must save the champagne!’ he said, and, bending his chair backward, he was about to recall the man, when Lucy stopped him.

'Don't—don't, *please*, Mr. Edwardes!' she said, in an agony. He lifted his eyebrows good-humouredly, and desisted. Then he asked her if he should give her some water, and when that was done the episode apparently seemed to him closed, for he turned away again, and looked out for fresh opportunities with Lady Alice. Lucy, meanwhile, was left feeling herself even more unsuccessful and more out of place than before, and ready to sink with vexation. And how well David was getting on! There he was, between Mrs. Shepton and the beautiful lady in pink, and he and Mrs. Wellesdon were deep in conversation, his dark head bent gravely towards her, his face melting every now and then into laughter or crossed by some vivid light of assent and pleasure. Lucy's look travelled over the table, the orchids with which it was covered, the lights, the plate, then to the Vandykes behind the guests, and the great mirrors in between—came back to the table, and passed from face to face, till again it rested upon David. The conviction of her husband's handsome looks and natural adequacy to this or any world, with which her survey ended, brought with it a strange mixture of feelings—half pleasure, half bitterness.

'Are you from this part of the world, may I ask?' said a voice at her elbow.

She turned, and saw Colonel Danby, who was tired of devoting himself to the wife of a neighbouring Master of Hounds—a lady with white hair and white eyelashes, always apparently on the point of sleep, even at the liveliest dinner-table—and was now inclined to see what this little provincial might be made of.

'Oh, yes! we are from Manchester,' said Lucy, straightening herself, and preparing to do her best. 'We live in Manchester—at least, of course, not *in* Manchester. No one could do that.'

It was but three years since she had ceased to do it, but new habits of speech grow apace when it is a matter of social prestige. She was terribly afraid lest anybody should now think of them as persons who lived over their shop.

'Ah!—suppose not,' said Colonel Danby, carelessly. 'Land in Manchester, they tell me now, is almost as costly as it is in London.'

Whereat Lucy went off at score, delighted to make Manchester important and to produce her own information. She had an aptitude for business gossip, and she chatted eagerly about the price that So-and-So had paid for their new warehouses, and the sum which report said the Corporation was going to spend on a fine new street.

'And of course many people don't like it. There's always grumbling about the rates. But they should have public spirit, shouldn't they? Are you acquainted with Manchester?' she added, more timidly.

All this time Colonel Danby had been listening with half an ear, and was much more assiduously trying to make up his mind whether the little *bourgeoise* was pretty at all. She had rather a

fine pair of eyes—he supposed she had made that dress in her own back parlour.

'Manchester? I—oh, I have spent a night at the Queen's Hotel now and then,' said the Colonel, with a yawn. 'What do you do there? Do you amuse yourself—eh?'

His smile was not pleasant. He had a florid face, with bad lines round the eyes and a tyrannous mouth. His physical make had been magnificent, but reckless living had brought on the penalties of gout before their time.

Lucy was intimidated by the mixture of familiarity and patronage in the tone.

'Oh, yes,' she said, hurriedly; 'we get all the best companies from the London theatres, and there are *very* good concerts.'

'And that kind of thing amuses you?' said the Colonel, still examining her with the same cool, fixed glance.

'I like music very much,' stammered Lucy, and then fell silent.

'Do you know all these people here?'

'Oh, dear, no!' she cried, feeling the very question malevolent. 'I don't know any of them. My husband wishes to lead a very retired life,' she added, bristling a little, by way of undoing the effect of her admissions.

'And *you* don't wish it?'

The disagreeable eyes smiled again.

'Oh! I don't know,' said Lucy.

Colonel Danby reflected that whatever his companion might be, she was not amusing.

'Have you noticed the gentleman opposite?' he inquired, stifling another yawn.

Lucy timidly looked across.

'It is—it is the Dean of Bradford, isn't it?'

'Yes; it's a comfort, isn't it, when one can know a man by his clothes! Do you see what his deanship has had for dinner?'

Lucy ventured another look, and saw that the Dean had in front of him a plate of biscuits and a glass of water, and that the condition of his knives and forks showed him to have hitherto subsisted on this fare alone.

'Is he so very—so very religious?' she said, wondering.

'A saint in gaiters? Well, I don't know. Probably the saint has dined at one. Do you feel any inclination to be a saint, Mrs. Grieve?'

Lucy could neither meet nor parry the banter of his look. She only blushed.

'I wouldn't attempt it, if I were you,' he said, laughing.

'Those pretty brown eyes weren't meant for it.'

Lucy suddenly felt as though she had been struck, so free and cavalier was the tone. Her cheek took a deeper crimson, and she looked helplessly across at David.

'Little fool!' thought the Colonel. 'But she has certainly some points.'

At that moment Lady Driffield gave the signal, and, with a half-ironical bow to his companion, Colonel Danby rose, picked up her handkerchief for her, and drew his chair aside to let her pass.

Presently Lucy was sitting in a corner of the magnificent green drawing-room, to which Lady Driffield had carelessly led the way. In her vague humiliation and unhappiness, she craved that some one should come and talk to her and be kind to her—even Mrs. Shepton, who had addressed a few pleasant remarks to her on their way from the dining-room. But Mrs. Shepton was absorbed by Lady Driffield, who sat down beside her, and took some trouble to talk. 'Then why not to me?' was Lucy's instinctive thought. For she realised that she and Mrs. Shepton were socially not far apart. Yet Lady Driffield had so far addressed about six words to Mrs. David Grieve, while she was now bending her aristocratic neck to listen to Mrs. Shepton, who was talking entirely at her ease, with her arm round the back of a neighbouring chair, and, as it seemed to Lucy, about politics.

The rest of the ladies, with the exception of the Master of Hounds' wife, who sat in a chair by the fire and dozed, were all either old friends or relations, and they gathered in a group on the Aubusson rug in front of the fire, chatting merrily about their common kindred, the visits they had paid, or were to pay, the fate of their fathers and brothers in the recent election, 'the Duke's' terrible embarrassments, or 'Sir Alfred's' yachting party to Norway, of which little Lady Alice gave a sparkling account.

In her chair on the outskirts of the talkers, Lucy sat painfully turning over the leaves of a costly collection of autographs, which lay on the table near her. Sometimes she tried to interest herself in the splendid room, with its hangings of pale flowered silk, its glass cases, full of historical relics, miniatures, and precious things, representing the long and brilliant past of the house of Driffield, the Sir Joshuas and Romneys, which repeated on the walls the grace and physical perfection of some of the living women below. But she had too few associations with anything she saw to care for it, and, indeed, her mind was too wholly given to her own vague, but overmastering sense of isolation and defeat. If it were only bedtime!

Mrs. Wellesdon glanced at the solitary figure from time to time, but Lady Alice had her arm round 'Marcia's' waist, and kept close hold of her favourite cousin. At last, however, Mrs. Wellesdon drew the young girl with her to the side of Lucy's chair, and, sitting down by the stranger, they both tried to entertain her, and to show her some of the things in the room.

Lucy brightened up at once, and thought them both the most beautiful and fascinating of human beings. But her good fortune was soon over, alas! for the gentlemen came in, and the social elements were once more redistributed. 'Reggie,' the young diplomatist, freshly returned from Berlin, laid hold of his sister

Marcia, and his cousin Lady Alice, and carried them off for a family gossip into a corner of the room, whence peals of young laughter were soon to be heard from him and Lady Alice.

Mr. Edwardes and Colonel Danby passed Mrs. Grieve by, in quest of metal more attractive; Lord Driffield, the Dean, Canon Aylwin, and David stood absorbed in conversation; while Lady Driffield transferred her attentions to Mr. Shepton, and the husband of the lady by the fire walked up to her, insisting, somewhat crossly, on waking her. Lucy was once more left alone.

'Lavinia, haven't we done our duty to this apartment?' cried Lord Driffield, impatiently; 'it always puts me on stilts. The library is ten times more comfortable. I propose an adjournment.'

Lady Driffield shrugged her shoulders, and assented. So the whole party, Lucy timidly attaching herself to Mrs. Shepton, moved slowly through a long suite of beautiful rooms, till they reached the great cedar-fitted library, which was Lord Driffield's paradise. Here was every book to be desired of the scholar to make him wise, and every chair to make him comfortable. Lord Driffield went to one of the bookcases, and took a vellum-bound book, found a passage in it, and showed it to David Grieve. Canon Aylwin and the Dean pressed in to look, and they all fell back into the recess of a great oriel, talking earnestly.

The others passed on into a conservatory beyond the library, where was a billiard-table, and many nooks for conversation amid the cunning labyrinths of flowers.

Lucy sank into a cane chair, close to a towering mass of arum lilies, and looked back into the library. Nobody in the conservatory had any thought for her. They were absorbed in each other, and a merry game of pyramids had been already organised. So Lucy watched her husband wistfully.

What a beautiful face was that of Canon Aylwin, with whom he was talking! She could not take her eyes from its long, thin outlines, the apostolic white hair, the eager eyes and quivering mouth, contrasting with the patient courtesy of manner. Yet in her present soreness and heat, the saintly charm of the old man's figure did somehow but depress her the more.

A little after ten it became evident that *nothing* could keep the lady with the white eyelashes out of bed any longer, so the billiard-room party broke up, and, with a few gentlemen in attendance, the ladies streamed into the hall, and possessed themselves of bedroom candlesticks. The great house seemed to be alive with talk and laughter as they strolled upstairs, the girls making dressing-gown appointments in each other's rooms for a quarter of an hour later.

When Lucy reached her own door she stopped awkwardly. Lady Driffield walked on, talking to Marcia Wellesdon. But Marcia looked back:

'Good night, Mrs. Grieve.'

She returned, and pressed Lucy's hand kindly. 'I am afraid you must be tired,' she said; 'you look so.'

Lady Driffield also shook hands, but, with constitutional *gaucherie*, she did not second Mrs. Wellesdon's remark; she stood by silent and stiff.

'Oh, no, thank you,' said Lucy, hurriedly, 'I am quite well.'

When she had disappeared, the other two walked on.

'What a stupid little thing!' said Lady Driffield. 'The husband may be interesting—Driffield says he is—but I defy anybody to get anything out of the wife.'

It occurred to Marcia that nobody had been very anxious to make the attempt. But she only said aloud:

'I'm sure she is very shy. What a pity she wears that kind of dress! She might be quite pretty in something else.'

Meanwhile Lucy, after shutting the outer door of their little suite behind her, was overtaken as she opened that leading to her own room by a sudden gust of wind coming from a back staircase emerging on to their private passage, which she had not noticed before. The candle was blown out, and she entered the room in complete darkness. She groped for the matches, and found the little stand; but there were none there. She must have used the last in the making of her great illumination before dinner. After much hesitation, she at last summoned up courage to ring the bell, groping her way to it by the help of the light in the passage.

For a long time no one came. Lucy, standing near her own door, seemed to hear two sounds—the angry beating of her own heart, and a murmur of far-off talk and jollity, conveyed to her up the mysterious staircase, which apparently led to some of the servants' quarters.

Fully five minutes passed; then steps were heard approaching, and a housemaid appeared. Lucy timidly asked for fresh matches. The girl said 'Yes, ma'am,' in an off-hand way, looked at Lucy with a somewhat hostile eye, and vanished.

The minutes passed, but no matches were forthcoming. The whirlpool of the lower regions, where the fun was growing uproarious, seemed to have engulfed the messenger. At last Lucy was fain to undress by the help of a glimmer of light from her door left ajar, and after many stumbles and fumbings at last crept, tired and wounded, into bed. This finale seemed to her of a piece with all the rest.

As she lay there in the dark, incident after incident of her luckless evening coming back upon her, her heart grew hungry for David. Nay, her craving for him mounted to jealousy and passion. After all, though he did get on so much better in grand houses than she did, though they were all kind to him and despised her, he was *hers*, her very own, and no one should take him from her. Beautiful Mrs. Wellesdon might talk to him and make friends with him, but he did not belong to any of them, but to *her*, Lucy. She pined for the sound of his step—thought of throwing herself into his arms, and seeking consolation there for the pains of an habitual self-importance crushed beyond bearing. But when that step was actually heard outside, her mind veered

in an instant. She had made him come; he would think she had disgraced him; he had probably noticed nothing, for a certain absent-mindedness in society had grown upon him of late years. No, she would hold her peace.

So when David, stepping softly and shading his candle, came in, and called 'Lucy' under his breath to see whether she might be awake, Lucy pretended to be sound asleep. He waited a minute, and then went out to change his coat and go down to the smoking-room.

Poor little Lucy! As she lay there in the dark, the tears dropping slowly on her embroidered pillow, the issue of all her mortification was a new and troubled consciousness about her husband. Why this difference between them? How was it that he commanded from all who knew him either a warm sympathy or an involuntary respect, while she—

She had gathered from some scraps of the talk round him which had reached her that it was just those sides of his life—those quixotic ideal sides—which were an offence and annoyance to her that touched other people's imagination, opened their hearts. And she had worried and teased him all these years! Not since the beginning. For, looking back, she could well remember the days when it was still an intoxication that he should have married her, when she was at once in awe of him and foolishly, proudly, happy. But there had come a year when David's profits from his business had amounted to over 2,000*l.*, and when, thanks to a large loan pressed upon him by his Unitarian landlord, Mr. Doyle, he had taken the new premises in Prince's Street. And from that moment Lucy's horizon had changed, her ambitions had hardened and narrowed; she had begun to be impatient with her husband, first, that he could not make her rich faster, then, after their Tantalus gleam of wealth, that he would put mysterious and provoking obstacles in the way of their getting rich at all.

She meant to keep awake—to wait for him. But she began to think of Sandy. *He* would be glad to see his 'mummy' again! In fancy she pressed his cheek against her own burning one. He and David were still alive—still hers—it was all right somehow. Consolation began to steal upon her, and in ten minutes she was asleep.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN David came in later, he took advantage of Lucy's sleep to sit up awhile in his own room. He was excited, and any strong impression, in the practical loneliness of his deepest life, always now produced the impulse to write.

'*Midnight.*—Lucy is asleep. I hope she has been happy and they have been kind to her. I saw Mrs. Wellesdon talking to her after dinner. She must have liked that. But *at* dinner she seemed to be sitting silent a good deal.