XI

SHE was conscious that the whole world had turned against her; in every face she could read her condemnation; when she drove through High Street she felt like a deposed monarch—hats were still removed, but with pitying courtesy instead of with loyal fervour. Constraint and embarrassment sounded in every fresh voice to which she listened. Mr. Prentice, taking her instructions, assumed a ridiculously hollow cheerfulness, as if he had been speaking to somebody who had contracted an incurable disease. The shop staff dared not look at her, and yet could not look away from her with any air of naturalness; up and down the counters male and female assistants, so soon as she appeared, became preposterously busy; and she knew that they avoided meeting her eyes. She knew also that the moment she had passed, their eyes followed her—they were at once frightened and fascinated, as if she had been a person who had confessed to a great crime, who was still at large, but who would be arrested almost immediately.

During the first few days of her engagement she suffered under the heavy sense that every friend had abandoned her. In street, shop, or house, she could find no comforter. Even Yates was cruel.

"Why do you look so glum?" At last she roundly upbraided Yates. "Don't wait upon me at all, if you can only do it as though you were going to a funeral."

Yates, in sorrowful tones, said that her glumness was caused by her thoughts.

Then Mrs. Thompson piteously prayed for support from the old servant.

"Are you trying to drive me mad among you—make me commit suicide? Oh, Yates, do stand by me."

And Yates wept, and swore that henceforth she would stand by her mistress.

"Say you think I'm right in what I'm doing."

"I'll say this, ma'am—that no one should be the judge except you of what's right. No one hasn't any qualification to interfere with you in what you please to do."

"But, Yates, say you approve of it."

"Well, then, I do say it."

Yates said that she approved; but no one else said so. Enid did not pretend to approve—although she talked very little about her mother's plans. She had obtained the desire of her own heart; she and Mr. Kenion were to be made one as soon as possible; she was buying her trousseau, and Mr. Prentice was drawing the marriage settlement.

Both marriages were to be pushed on rapidly. No time like the present, as Marsden joyously declared. "What's the good of waiting, when you have made up your mind?" But Enid was to be cleared out of the way first; and not till Enid had left the little house could her mother throw herself completely into her own dream of bliss.

There were some trifling difficulties, some slight delays. Mr. Kenion, as one about to become a member of the family, frankly confessed that he viewed the Marsden alliance with repugnance. He told Mr. Prentice that it altered the whole condition of affairs, that his relatives

begged him to stand out for a much more liberal settlement than would previously have appeared to be ample; and he hinted on his own account that if Mrs. Thompson didn't stump up, he would feel justified in withdrawing altogether. Mr. Prentice, however, made short work of this suitor's questionings and threatenings. He did not mention that, on the strong advice of Mr. Marsden, his client had largely cut down the proposed amount; but he said that in his own opinion the settlement was quite ample.

"Of course," said Kenion, "what we get now is all we shall ever get. I don't value Enid's further expectations at a brass farthing."

"That's as it may be. Possibly you are wise in not building on the future. But my instructions merely concern the present. As to the amount decided on by my client, whether big or little—well, it is to take or leave."

Charlie Kenion, lounging deep in one of the solicitor's leather armchairs, said that he would take it.

At this period Mr. Prentice also received visits from the other suitor. Marsden called several times, to talk about the terms of his partnership, and to urge the importance of not overdoing it with regard to the provision for Enid. These marriage settlements, he reminded the solicitor are irrevocable things—what you put into them you can't get out of them. Nothing ever comes back to you. A woman in Mrs. Thompson's position should therefore exercise some caution. She is rich now, but she may not always be so rich; she must not give away more than she can spare; it is folly not to keep a reserve fund.

Then, when paying his last call before his departure for London, he slid very naturally from the subject of Enid's settlement to a vague question about a settlement in his

own case. Was there any idea of making a permanent provision for him?

"Of course there is. You are to be a partner."

That of course was understood, but Marsden had some doubt as to whether there were other intentions.

"I am only asking," he said pleasantly. "I leave myself entirely in your hands—and I'd like to say that I've the utmost confidence in *you*."

"Thank you," said Mr. Prentice dryly.

"These settlements seem the usual thing in marriages—so I thought the rule would apply to my marriage."

"In *your* marriage, Mr. Marsden, there is very little that is usual—but, nevertheless, I think the usual rules should apply."

"You do? You think some moderate settlement would be proper?"

"Very proper indeed—if you have anything to settle. By giving you a half share in her business, Mrs. Thompson is treating you with a generosity—a munificence—an unprecedented munificence——"

"Oh, I know she is."

"And if therefore you on your side can make a settlement—however moderate—in her favour, it will be a graceful and a natural act."

Marsden laughed, and shrugged his shoulders.

"That's very funny—very neatly put. But I see what you mean. You think I ought not to have made the suggestion."

"Oh, no," said Mr. Prentice, obviously meaning "Oh, yes."

"I fancied that she herself might wish it; but I haven't said a word about it to her. . . . Don't mention it to her. . . . Good morning."

Meanwhile Enid was collecting garments, hats, frills, and feathers. She had been given unlimited scope; prices need not be scrutinised; the best London shops, as well as Thompson's, were open to her; and she went about her business in a commendably business-like fashion. She did not require Mrs. Thompson's advice—she knew exactly what she wanted.

When those few trickling tears had been dried and the bombshell tidings of her mother's engagement had burst upon her with such appalling violence, she hardened and grew cold again. Nothing now would soften her.

She calmly announced that Charles had been lucky enough to find just the house they wished for—a farm-house recently converted into a gentleman's residence, with some land and excellent stabling, eight miles from Mallingbridge, between Haggart's Cross and Chapel-Norton; but she did not invite Mrs. Thompson to inspect the premises, or even to examine the patterns of the new wall-papers.

She disgusted Mr. Prentice by her obstinate support of her future husband in his final contention that the life interest given to him under the settlement should be absolute and inalienable. Mr. Prentice naturally desired to protect her from obvious dangers; but, instead of strengthening his hands, she idiotically declared her wish to compliment Kenion by an exhibition of blind confidence.

"It must be as Enid wishes," said Mrs. Thompson; and Mr. Prentice was forced to give way.

The days were racing by. Mornings had a snap of frost in the air; autumn rains brought the yellow leaves tumbling from the churchyard elms, and autumn winds sent them spinning and eddying over the iron railings

into St. Saviour's Court. Very soon now October would be here—and on the first day of October the church bells were to ring for Enid Thompson, spinster, of this parish.

Mrs. Thompson heard the banns read; but she could not hear the other banns in which the name of Thompson was again mumbled. Her emotion made the sound of the parson's voice inaudible to her.

One afternoon she saw Yates carrying up a large cardboard box to Enid's dressing-room, and the printed label on the box gave her a stab of pain. *Bence Brothers!* Enid, pressed for time, or now careless of how often she wounded her mother's sensibilities, had gone across the road to buy her ultimate batch of fal-lals.

Then one morning—a dull, grey first of October—Enid offered her cheek to her mother's lips.

"I hope you'll be very happy, mother." These were her last words.

The rooks, startled by the clashing bells, flew up from the tops of the churchyard trees; the misty air vibrated as the organ rolled out its voluminous music; the keen, sharp-edged wind blew the dead leaves down the court and past the house;—and Enid was blown away with them, into her lover's arms and out of her mother's life, as it seemed, for ever.

The days were swinging in a mad whirl; Mrs. Thompson had entered upon her feverish dream; and nothing outside herself seemed of any consequence to her now—except the man who was to be her husband.

He was in London, well supplied with cash for his immediate necessities, and he would not return until he

came to lead her to the altar. Several times she ran up to London with Yates, bought trousseau all the morning, and then, casting off Yates, had luncheon with him at some smart restaurant.

A first glance told her that he was more splendid than any other man in the building, and then everything about and beyond him became vague and dim and unsubstantial. She could see nothing else. Light and sound mingled; past and present fused, to make a panoramic changing background in front of which he could stand out more solidly and brilliantly. She heard the wheels of the train that had brought her to him, and at the same time she heard the waltz played by this restaurant band; she was surrounded by meaningless figures, from the field of vision and the fog of memory; close to her sat fashionable people at little tables;—but among them and through them moved the people she had seen in the open street, at the dressmaker's, to-day, yesterday, or a year ago.

But there was nothing vague or uncertain about him: he was overpoweringly, gloriously distinct. She could see every thread in his lovely new clothes, every hair in his perfumed, carefully brushed moustache, each tiny speck of brown on the liquid amber of his eyes. From those eyes, as she knew so well, he could shoot the darts of flame that lodged a burning distress in one's breast, as easily as he could send forth the gentle caressing beams that made one slowly melt in ecstacy.

His glance was always softly caressing now, soothing her, calming her, filling her with joy.

She could not eat. She could only look at him while he ate, with hearty youthful vigour, quite enough for two. She drank a glassful out of his bottle of wine, and found

an incredible delight in watching him drink the remainder. The waiter put the programme of the day's music by her side; but it did not matter what the band played. Her music—the only significant music—was in her sweetheart's voice. He called her Janey, Little woman, My kind fairy; and each time that he spoke to her thus endearingly she thrilled with rapture.

"Well, Janey, what do you think of my new coat? I look all right, don't I? You are not ashamed to be seen with me—eh, little woman? . . . And how's Mallingbridge? What do they say of me down there? . . .

"Oh, by the way, I haven't thanked my kind fairy for the present she sent me yesterday. It's a dressing-case fit for a king;" and then he laughed gaily. "Janey, take care. You are trying to spoil me."

Sometimes for a moment he held her hand under the table-cloth, and pressed it lovingly.

When the luncheon was over she was glad to notice that he tipped the waiter liberally. It would have been irksome to her, as a prodigious tipper, to observe any economy—but Marsden gave almost as much as if she herself had taken the money out of the purse. She used to hand him her purse as they went into the restaurant, and he gave it back to her as they came out again.

Serving-girls at the fashionable London shops were inclined to smile while they waited upon Mrs. Thompson choosing her nuptial finery. She seemed to them so innocent—appealing to them with simple trustfulness, and begging them to show her not merely pretty things, but the things that gentlemen would think pretty.

In truth, all her business faculty had temporarily forsaken her; the strong will, the quick insight, the grit and grip were gone; the experience of long years had been

washed out: she was an inexperienced girl again, with all a girl's tremors, joyous hopes, and nameless fears for the future.

Her fingers shook as she smoothed and patted the wonderful underclothes offered by a famous lingerie establishment; and as old Yates, sitting by the side of her mistress, gave a casting vote for this or that daintily laced garment, the lingerie young woman was obliged to turn a slim back in order to conceal her mirth. Perhaps it would have made her cry if she could have understood. But no one could see the poignantly touching truth, that beneath the beaded mantle of this reddish, stoutish, middle-aged customer, a maiden's heart was fondly beating.

"You know, Yates, I'm not so stupid as to suppose that I shall always be able to keep him tied to my apron strings." This was in the train, when they were returning to Mallingbridge after an arduous day's shopping. They had the compartment to themselves, and they nearly filled it with their parcels. "Men must be allowed freedom and liberty."

"Yes, ma'am, *bachelor* gentlemen. But I'm not so sure about too much liberty for *married* gentlemen."

"They can't be continually cooped up in their home—however comfortable you make it for them. No, many happy marriages are upset by the wife's silliness—in thinking that a husband is for ever to be dancing attendance on her. I shan't commit that error."

"No, ma'am. Of course it isn't as if it was your first time."

Truly, however, it was her first time. The recollection of the dead husband and the loveless marriage made her wince.

"A little tact," she said hurriedly. "A wife—especially in the early days—is called on for a little tact."

"Oh, ma'am, you'll manage him all right—with your knowledge of the world."

But her knowledge of the world had gone, and she did not wish it back again. Each time that for a brief space she thought logically and clearly, doubt and fear tortured her.

In the night fear used to come. Suddenly her rainbow-tinted dream disintegrated, fell into shreds and patches of cloud, with wisps of coloured light that gyrated and faded; and then she lay staring at the blank wall of hard facts. This thing was monstrous—no valid hope of permanent happiness in it.

And she thought, with dreadful clearness, that she was either not young enough or not old enough for such a marriage. If she had been ten years older, it would not have mattered—it would be just a legalised companionship—an easier arrangement, but essentially the same thing as though she had adopted him as her son. But now it must be a *real* marriage—or a most tragic failure. He had made her believe that the realm of passion and love was not closed to her; that he would give her back what the years had taken from her; that she might drink at the fountain of his youth and so renew her own.

In the dark cold night when the dream vanished, fear ruled over her. The words of the marriage service—heard so lately—echoed in her ears. Solemnisation or sacrament—it is impious, blasphemous to enter God's house and ask for a blessing on the bond, unless the marriage falls within the limits of nature's laws. She remembered what the priest says about the causes for

which matrimony was ordained; she remembered what the woman has to say about God's holy ordinance; and best of all she remembered what the man, taught by the priest, says when he slips the ring on the woman's finger.

"With my body I thee worship!" . . . Could it be possible? "Taught by the Priest"—yes, but the man should need no teaching. The words on his lips should be the light rippling murmur above the strong-flowing stream of his secret thoughts, and the stream must be fed by deep springs of perfectly normal love. Nothing less will satisfy, nothing less *can* satisfy the hungry heart that is surrendering itself to his power. Respect, esteem, steadfast affection—none of that will do. It must be love, or nothing.

Yet after each of these troubled nights the day brought back her dream.

Yates had promised to stand by her, and she faithfully kept the promise. She gave homely, well-meant advice; occasionally administered a little dose of pain in what she intended for a sedative or stimulant; but was always ready with sympathy, even when she failed to supply consolation and encouragement. Apparently forgetting in the excitement of the hour that she herself was an old spinster, she spoke with extreme confidence of all the mysteries of the marriage state.

There was uneasiness about little secrets concerning Mrs. Thompson's toilet; but Yates made light of them.

"Oh, nonsense," said Yates. "It isn't as if you were like some of these meretrishis ladies with nothing genuine about 'em. You're all genuine—and not a grey hair on your head."

There was nothing very terrible in the secrets. The worst secret perhaps was the diminution in aspect, the shrinking of the coronet of hair, when the sustaining frame had been removed.

But Yates, the old spinster, speaking so wisely and confidently, said "Don't tell me, ma'am. If he's fond of you, a little thing like that isn't going to put him off. . . . Besides, you must fluff it out big—like I'm doing;" and Yates worked on with brush and comb. "Now look at yourself."

And Mrs. Thompson peered at her reflection in the glass. The frame lay on the dressing-table. Still she seemed to have a fine tawny mane of her own, fluffed wide from her brows, and falling in respectably big masses.

"Show me, Yates, exactly how you get the effect."

And under the watchful tuition of Yates, Mrs. Thompson toiled at her lesson.

"Is that right?"

"Yes, that's pretty near as well as I can work it out, myself. . . . Yes, that'll do very nice. . . . You know, it'll only be at first that you need take so much trouble."

"Yates, I shall be nervous and clumsy—I shall forget, and make a mess of it."

"Then take me with you," said Yates earnestly. "I can't think why you don't take me along with you."

"Oh, I couldn't," said Mrs. Thompson. "I *couldn't* have anyone with me—least of all, anyone who'd known me before."

It had come to be the day before the day of days, and St. Saviour's Court lay wrapped in drab-hued fog, so that

from the windows of the house she could not see as far as the churchyard on one side or the street on the other; and all day long, behind the curtain of fog, the chilly autumn rain was falling.

Throughout the day she remained indoors, reviewing and arranging her trousseau, watching Yates pack the new trunks and bags, and learning how and where she was to find things when she and some strange hotel chambermaid hastily did the unpacking. Now, late at night, her bedroom was still in confusion—empty cardboard boxes littering the floor, dressing-gowns trailing across the backs of chairs, irrepressible silk skirts bulging from beneath trunk lids.

At last Yates finished the task, prepared her mistress for bed, and left her.

"Good-night, ma'am—and mind you sleep sound. Don't get thinking about to-morrow, and wearing yourself out instead of taking your rest."

Unfortunately Mrs. Thompson was not able to follow this sensible advice. A fire burned cheerfully in the grate, the room was warm and comfortable, and she wandered about aimlessly and musingly—picking up silver brushes and putting them down again, gently pressing the trunk tops, looking at the new initials that had been painted on the glazed leather.

Presently she was stooping over one of the smaller trunks, smoothing and patting the folded night-dress that she and Yates had so carefully selected at the famous London shop. Her lips parted in a smile as she looked at its infinitely delicate tucks and frills, and she let her fingers play with the lace and feel the extraordinary lightness and softness of its texture.

Then, yielding to a sudden impulse, she pulled out the

garment, carried it to the bed, and, hastily stripping, tried it on.

To-night Yates had done no fluffing-out of her hair. It was tightly screwed against her head, in the metal curling-clips that were to give it a pretty wave when pulled over the frame to-morrow; but it had a bald aspect now, with its queer little rolled excrescences protruding above the scalp, and two mean pigtails hanging limply behind the ears, and hiding their ends in the lace of the night-dress collar.

The electric light was shining full into the cheval glass as she came and stood before it, with the smile of pleasure still on her lips. Then she saw herself in the glass, and began to tremble.

Through the diaphanous veil the strong light seemed to show her a grotesque and lamentable figure: heavy fullness instead of shapely slenderness, exaggerated curves, distorted outlines,—the pitiless ravages wrought by time.

With a sob of terror, she ran to the door, and again to the dressing-table, switching off the light, desperately seeking the kindly darkness. Her hands were shaking, she felt sick and faint, while she tore the nightgown from her shoulders and kicked it from her on the floor. Then she covered herself with a woollen dressing-gown and crept, sobbing, into bed.

The firelight flickered on the ceiling, but no heat was thrown by the yellow flames or the red coals; a deadly chill seemed to have issued from the polished surface of the big glass, striking at her heart, reaching and gripping her bones. She lay shivering and weeping.

Outside the windows the cruel autumn rain pattered on the stone flags, the cruel autumn wind sighed and

moaned and echoed from the cold brick walls. The year was dying; the fertile joyous months were dead; soon the barren hopeless winter would be here. And she felt that her own life was dead; warmth, colour, beauty, had gone from it; only ugliness, disfigurement, decay, were left. And she wept for her wasted youth, her vanished grace, for all that makes the summer in a woman's life.

But next day she woke in sunlight. White clouds raced across a blue sky; the air was warm and genial; and, as she walked up St. Saviour's Court, leaning on the kind arm of Mr. Prentice, she was a girl again.

There were many people in the church, but their curious glances did not trouble her. Sunbeams streaming through painted glass made a rainbow radiance on the chancel steps; and here she stood by her lover's side, feeling happy and at ease in the radiant heart of the glorious dream. Sweet music, sacred words—and then the sound of his voice, the pressure of his fingers. Nothing could touch her now—she was safe in the dream, beyond the reach of ridicule, high above the range of pity.

Solemnisation or sacrament—now at the last it did not matter which; for she had brought to the rites all that priests can demand: pure and unselfish thoughts, guileless faith, and innocent hope.

The loud swelling pipes of the organ rolled forth their harmonious thunders, filling the air with waves, making the book on the vestry table throb beneath her hand. She was half laughing, half crying, and a shaft of sunlight danced about her head.

"Happy is the bride that the sun shines on," said

Mr. Prentice, very, very kindly. "God bless you, my dear."

Another day's sun was shining on the bride. This was the third day of the wonderful, miraculously blissful honey-moon; and, with windows wide open and the sweet clean air blowing in upon them, the husband and wife lingered over their breakfast in the private sitting-room of the tremendous and magnificent Brighton hotel.

Presently Mr. Marsden got up, stretched himself; and, going to one of the windows, looked down at the sparkling brightness and pleasant gaiety of the King's Road.

"Now, little woman, I'm going to smoke my cigar outside. . . . You can put on your hat, and join me whenever you please."

Mrs. Marsden followed him to the window, sat upon the arm of a large velvet chair, and leaned her face against his coat sleeve.

"Take care," he said, laughing, "or you'll find yourself on the floor."

The chair had in fact shown signs of overturning, and Mrs. Marsden playfully pretended that she could not retain her position, and allowed herself to flop down upon her knees.

"Isn't this my right place, Dick—kneeling on the ground at your feet?"

Then with a gesture that would have been infinitely graceful in quite a young girl, she took his hand and held it to her lips.

"You foolish Janey, get up," and he gave her cheek a friendly tap.

"My own boy," she murmured, "why shouldn't I kneel? You have opened the gates of heaven for me."

After he had left the room she stood at the window, and watched until he reappeared on the broad pavement below.

People were walking, riding, spinning along in motor-cars; gulls hovered above the beach on lazy wings; pebbles, boat gunwhales, lamp-posts, every smooth hard surface, flashed in the sunlight; the gentle breeze smelt deliciously fresh and clean;—all was bright and gay and splendid, because so full of pulsing life. But the most splendid thing in sight was her husband. The man out there—that glorious creature, with his hat cocked and his stick twirling as he swaggered across the broad roadway—was her handsome, splendid husband.

The sun shone on her face, and the love shone out of it to meet the genial vivifying rays. "My husband;" and she murmured the words aloud. "My own darling boy. My strong, kind, noble husband."

It was a real marriage.

XII

THE abnormally bright weather continued in an unbroken spell, and it seemed to her a part of the miracle that had been granted to her prayers—as if nature had suddenly abrogated all laws, and when giving her back love and youth, had given warmth and sunshine to the whole world.

One afternoon, as they were sauntering home to the hotel, he asked her if there was not some special name for this snatch of unseasonable autumn brightness.

"It's more than we had a right to expect, Janey, so late in the year. Here we are in the first week of November, and I'll swear to-day has been as warm as May or June."

"Yes, hasn't it?"

"But what do they call it when the weather plays tricks at this time of year? You know—not the Hunter's moon, but some name like that."

"Oh, yes, I know what you mean—St. Martin's summer."

"That's right—learned old girl!—St. Martin's summer."

Then they turned to the shop windows, and considered the window-dressing art as displayed by these Brighton tradesmen. All through their honey-moon the King's Road shops provided a source of unfailing entertainment.

"I don't see that they know much," he said patronisingly. "I think I could open their eyes. You wait, old girl, till we get back to Mallingbridge, and I'll astonish

you. I'm bubbling over with ideas. . . . Halloa! That's rather tasty."

They were looking into a jeweller's window, and his eye had been caught by a cigarette case.

"Now I wonder, Janey, what they'd have the cheek to ask for that."

"Let us go in and enquire."

"Oh, no. It's not worth while. Why, the gold alone, without the gems, would cost fifteen quid; and if the stones are as good as they look, I dare say this chap would expect a hundred guineas for it."

"Well, we might enquire."

"No, I mustn't think about it. Come on, old girl, or my mouth will begin to water for it;" and, laughing, he linked his arm in hers, and led her away from this too tempting shop. "Let 'em keep it till they can catch a millionaire."

They ordered tea in the great noisy hall of the hotel, which he preferred to the quiet grandeur of the private sitting-room; and she, pretending that she wished to go upstairs, hurried past the lift door, dodged round by a crowd of new arrivals, ran down the steps, and left the building.

She was hot and red and breathless when, after twenty minutes, she came bustling into the hall again. The tea-tray stood waiting for them; but he had moved away to another table, and was drinking a whisky and soda with some hotel acquaintances. These were a loud vulgar man and two over-dressed, giggling, free-and-easy daughters. Marsden for a little time did not see his wife: he was laughing and talking vivaciously; and the young women contorted themselves in shrill merriment, ogled and leered, and made chaffing, unbecomingly familiar interjections.

"That fellow," said Marsden presently, when he had

returned to his wife's table, "is in a very big way of business—and he might be useful to us some day or other. That's why I do the civil to him."

"Yes?" said Mrs. Marsden.

"But where the dickens did you slip away to? Your tea must be cold. Shall I order a fresh pot?"

"Oh, no, this is quite right, thank you."

She drank a little of her tepid tea; and then, fumblingly, with fingers that were slightly trembling, she brought the little parcel out of her pocket and put it in his hand.

"What on earth is this?"

"Can't you guess?"

"No—I can't imagine—unless——" He was slowly unfolding the layers of tissue paper; and until the precious metal discovered itself, he did not raise his eyes. "Oh, I *say!* Janey! But you shouldn't have done it—you really shouldn't. It's too bad—altogether too bad of you."

"Dick!"

"Come upstairs and let me kiss you—or I shall have to kiss you here, with everybody looking at us."

Then Mrs. Marsden was well content with her little act of extravagance.

The culmination of the glorious weather came on Sunday. In the morning, when she emerged from the dim church where she had been pouring out her fervent gratitude for so much happiness, the glare of the sea-front almost blinded her. All the wide lawns by the sea were densely thronged with people, and amongst the moving crowd she searched in vain for her husband. He had said he would meet her for this church parade.

But at the hotel there was a note to explain his absence. "My friends," she read, "insist on carrying me

off for a long run in their car. Shall try to be back for dinner. But don't wait."

While she was kneeling in the church, thanking God for having given him to her, he was rolling fast away—with that loud man and the two shrill young women.

It was late in the afternoon—the close of the brilliant sunlit day, and the Hove lawns were still crowded. The sky preserved its clear blue, unspoilt by the faint white stains of cloud; the sea sparkled; and the shadows thrown by the green chairs and the iron railings crept imperceptibly across the grass. Behind the railings the long façades of the white houses stretched westward like a perspective-drawing; and down the broad road a motor fizzed past every moment, changed to a black speck, and vanished. The gaiety and life of the hours was lasting bravely. Coloured flags floated above the pier; and from the monstrous protuberance at its far end, the glass and iron castle of the tourist mob, light flashed as though striking mirrors; a band was playing at a distance; and the Worthing steamboat, as it hurriedly approached, made a rhythmic beating on the water.

Mrs. Marsden, in possession of a penny chair, sat alone, and watched the crowd that had been walking all day long. She felt absolutely lost in the crowd; and it seemed to her, coming from her quiet country town, that the world could not contain so many people.

She watched them with tired eyes. All sorts: fine ladies and gentlemen; visitors and residents—down the scale to mere shopgirls and housemaids; pale men who toiled indoors, bronzed men who lived in the open air; Jews and Jewesses; smiling matrons, sour-visaged spin-

sters; girls with powdered faces and immense hats—whom she classed as actresses, and judged to be no better than they ought to be,—lounging and simpering beside sawny cavaliers.

She watched the various couples—boys and girls, men and women, young and old; and she saw that every couple was of corresponding, *suitable* age: tottering old men and white-haired, wrinkled dames—thinking of their golden wedding; fat paunchy men in the prime of life with gorgeous mature consorts; lithe and athletic men with long-legged, striding, game-playing mates; and so on, like with like, or each the normal complement of the other.

It happened that, while she watched with a growing intentness, there passed no Mays and Decembers. An old man and his daughter—or just possibly his wife! But no young man with a middle-aged woman. Not even a son escorting his mother. Age has no claim on youth.

Then she saw the roaming solitary men who were seeking love or adventure; saw how they stared at the girls,—stopped and turned,—with their eyes wistfully followed the graceful gracious forms.

And no man in all the vast crowd looked at her. Not even the purple-checked veterans. None gave her the aldermanic approving glance that might seem to say, "There's a well-preserved woman—not yet quite devoid of charm." Not even a glance of curiosity. It was as if for a penny the chair had rendered her invisible.

A cold air came off the sea, and she shivered. Looking round, she saw that the sun had just dipped behind the long white cornice of the stately houses. The wide lawn was in shadow.

She felt cold, and shivered several times as she walked home to the noisy hotel.