"Well," said he, "you have played your part well. But let me beg you, for your own sake, don't do it too often. Be satisfied with my humiliation."

She was weeping silently, and he had enough feeling for her to try to shield her from the curious eyes at the house.

"I did not mean to speak so harshly," he said soothingly. "It was only a moment's bitterness. You must control yourself before we go back."

The dusk favored her as she went in and up to her room. With the passing of her light footfall, a strange feeling of romantic self-pity came over him, but he lit a cigar, and smoked with unexpected tranquility.

He looked in on Thornbury on his way to his own room. "I've decided to go home to-morrow, old fellow," he said.

"So have I."

"What for?"

"Reason enough. I had a little talk with the charmer this morning. We didn't get very serious, but she was kind enough to straighten me out before I had gone far. But I don't see why you are going. She admitted to me that she preferred you."

"Preferences don't count. I had a little talk with her to-night, and I found out that she is engaged to Sniggins."

Thornbury dropped an armful of things he was carrying to his trunk, and wept upon the edge of the bed, a victim to surprise.

"Well," said he reflectively, "it strikes me that we have been sold. Wouldn't the fellows at the club like to get hold of this?"

Laurens wished him a good-night, and left him to recover from the shock alone.

V.

"The fellows at the club" generally thought that Laurens and Thornbury must have had a dull time at Homer's. There seemed to be nothing for them to praise but the fishing. Between the friends, very little mention was made of their summer experiences. Thornbury seemed to have been lightly touched; he was gay as ever at all the parties that fall. But Laurens did not get over it so easily.

He neglected many invitations, and it was only from the conscientious weight of an obligation to society that he went when he did.

He attended most of Mrs. Wingate's receptions, and she made a point of bringing interesting people to him, but she shook her head over his indifference.

One evening she came and carried him away from a political discussion in her library.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"A young lady. No," she said, laughing at his pretence of drawing back, "you shall not escape."

They went through the long drawing-rooms to the conservatory, Mrs. Wingate explaining that it was a relative of hers, a Boston girl, who had lately completed her education. As they stepped out among the flowers, a slight figure in a group of young people turned toward them. Laurens felt a queer lightness in his head—the quick stopping of the pulse which comes even to a strong man with intense surprise. It was Miss Way. Her color only deepened a little as Mrs. Wingate presented him, and she began to talk easily on some trivial topic. The sound of music from the parlor called their companions away, and he stood looking at her as if she were an illusion, whose enjoyment must be seized now or never.

"I wish," said he, "before we go any further in discussing the opera, in which I haven't the remotest interest, you would tell me who you are."

She laughed, and looked up with her old winning coquetry. "Only a simple Boston girl."

"But I thought you lived in North Chanton, or some such place."

"I lived in South Chanton—you must have been interested in me not to remember north from south—a whole long month with dear, harmless Aunt Jane. Don't you think I made a good country belle? I was so tired of home