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**About This Edition**

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice.
The text was generated using ChatGPT and prepared for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

This edition aims to support fluency development through accessible vocabulary, expanded narration, and improved readability while preserving the original story structure.

**Content Note**

This adaptation is based on a historical literary work. It may contain expressions, attitudes, or depictions that some readers may consider inappropriate or offensive by today's standards. Such elements have been retained or reflected where necessary in order to preserve the historical and literary character of the original work.

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Ford Madox Ford, *The Good Soldier* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified by ChatGPT)

## Part 1 — The Saddest Story

This is the saddest story I have ever heard. For nine seasons, my wife and I knew Captain Edward Ashburnham and his wife, Leonora, at Nauheim. We seemed to know them very well. We sat with them, walked with them, ate with them, and lived beside them almost every day. Yet now I see that, in another way, we knew almost nothing about them. I did not know the deep places in an English heart. I knew only the surface.

My wife and I were Americans, but we lived mostly in Europe. Paris was our real home. In winter we went to the south, somewhere near Nice or Bordighera. From July to September we went to Nauheim, because my wife, Florence, was said to have a weak heart. The doctors said that even the short sea trip to England might kill her. So we stayed on the continent year after year, moving from one safe place to another.

Captain Ashburnham also had a weak heart, or so we believed. His trouble came, people said, from polo and from too much sport when he was young. A month at Nauheim each year was enough to set him right again. But Florence needed much more care. Two months at Nauheim were only just enough to keep her alive for another year. Her illness, I was told, began during a bad storm at sea when we first crossed to Europe.

When we first met the Ashburnhams, Edward was thirty-three and Leonora was thirty-one. I was thirty-six, and Florence was thirty. Now Florence would be thirty-nine, if she were alive. Edward would be forty-two. I am forty-five, and Leonora is forty. So our friendship was not the friendship of young people, but of people who were already quiet and settled. The Ashburnhams seemed to be exactly what English people call good people.

Their family was old and respected. Leonora came from an old family too. Florence was from Stamford, Connecticut, and her people were old-fashioned in

their own American way. I myself am a Dowell of Philadelphia, and my family also had old English roots. I carried with me the papers of an old family farm, as if those papers tied me to some place on earth. I am writing now from the Ashburnham country, near the place where Florence's family also had old connections.

You may ask why I write this story. I hardly know. Perhaps people who have seen a city fall, or a whole life break apart, feel that they must write down what they saw. Perhaps they write for people who will come after them. Or perhaps they write only to get the picture out of their own heads. That is what I am trying to do. I saw our small world break into pieces.

To anyone watching us, we must have looked completely safe. Imagine the four of us sitting at a small table outside a club house, taking tea in the afternoon. The music was playing, the sun was gentle, and everything seemed peaceful. We seemed like a strong little castle. We seemed like a white ship on a blue sea, beautiful and sure. Who would not feel safe with us?

I still find it hard to believe that it is all gone. For nine years and six weeks our life moved with calm steps, like an old dance. We always knew where to sit, where to walk, and which table to choose. We rose together and moved together without needing to speak. The music played, the trees gave shade, and the fountains shone in the sun. It seemed as if such a life could never end.

But I must be honest. It was not really a dance. It was more like a prison. Inside that prison there were frightened cries, but we did not hear them over the smooth sound of our own carriage wheels. Still, the sunshine was real. The music was real. The water from the fountains was real. If I thought we were four people with the same tastes and the same peaceful habits, then that was also true, at least for me.

Suppose you owned a fine apple for nine years, and only later found that it was rotten inside. Would it be false to say that, for nine years, you owned a fine apple? I do not think so. That was how it was with Edward, Leonora, and poor Florence. The outside was beautiful. The inside was already spoiled. But I did not see it.

Now I know almost nothing about the hearts of men and women. I only know that I am alone, terribly alone. No warm room will ever again feel friendly to me.

No smoking room will ever be simple and safe. Yet what should I know, if not such places? I spent my whole life in them. I believed that I understood quiet friendship, marriage, good manners, and ordinary comfort.

For twelve years, after the storm that was supposed to have hurt Florence's heart, I watched over her. I almost never let her out of my sight. When she was not in bed, I was near her. If I left her, it was only when she was safely upstairs and I was downstairs with other men. I was always careful, always quiet, always trying to protect her. And yet she knew things, and did things, that I never imagined.

How did she find the time? When did she talk for so long with Leonora? When did she carry messages and make plans between Edward and his wife? It must have happened when I was taking my baths, or doing exercises, or having some small care done for myself. I had to keep myself healthy because I was her nurse. But even those small times do not seem enough. The whole thing still seems impossible.

Edward and Leonora looked like the perfect married couple. He seemed kind, honest, and simple. He had clear blue eyes and a warm, open manner. She was tall, fair, strong, and beautiful. She rode well, dressed well, and seemed perfectly made for her place in life. She looked so right, so good, and so complete that she almost seemed too good to be true.

Yet only this afternoon Leonora told me something strange. She said, "Once I tried to have a lover. I was so tired and so hurt inside that I thought I would take one good moment for myself." She told me she was in a carriage after a dance, in the dark, in a man's arms. She said to herself, "Now I will have a good time, just once in my life." But then all her long pain came back to her. She began to cry, and she cried for the whole ride home.

I did not know what to think of that story. Was it wicked? Was it only human? Was it what many good women feel but never say? I do not know. Perhaps mothers teach their daughters many things without words. Perhaps people know these things in their hearts, even when they never speak them aloud. If I do not understand even this, what do I understand?

I asked Leonora if she had told Florence about that night. She said that she had, and that Florence had made almost no comment. According to Leonora, Florence believed that a woman in such a position might take her chance if it came. Florence was too polite to say this directly about Leonora. But that was what she meant. And Leonora remembered it.

I do not want you to think that I am calling Edward a monster. I do not believe he was one. Perhaps many men are like him. In smoking rooms I have heard men tell ugly stories, and yet those same men would be angry if you said they were not safe near your wife. Perhaps they would have a right to be angry. I do not know whom anyone can trust.

Edward looked cleaner and better than almost any man I knew. He was a good soldier, a good judge in local matters, and, people said, a good landlord. He was patient with poor people and with hopeless drunkards. He almost never told an ugly story. In fact, he did not even like to hear one. You would have said he was exactly the man with whom you could trust your wife.

And I did trust him with mine. That was madness. But what about me? I have never spoken in an improper way, and I believe my thoughts and my life have been clean. Does that make me better, or only weaker? Is the proper man the one who burns with desire for every woman near him? Or is all this only foolishness and darkness?

I do not know. There seems to be no clear guide. If the simplest matters of love, marriage, and desire are so hard to understand, how can we understand anything else between one person and another? Should we live by rules, or by sudden feeling? I cannot answer. I only know that the story I must tell is full of darkness.

## Part 2 — Florence, Travel, and Uncle John

I do not know the best way to tell this story. Perhaps I should begin at the beginning and move straight forward, as people usually do. Or perhaps I should tell it as I learned it later, from Leonora’s words and from Edward’s words. My mind does not move in a straight line now. I see one thing, and then another thing

rises behind it.

So I will imagine that I am sitting beside a fire in a quiet country house. You are sitting opposite me, and you are listening without speaking. Outside, the sea makes a low sound, and the wind moves over the dark sky. From time to time we may stand at the door and look at the moon. Then we shall come back to the fire, and I shall go on talking in a low voice.

I am trying to show you what my life with Florence was like. She was bright, quick, and full of words. She could talk about almost anything. She talked about old kings, old battles, paintings, trains, dresses in Paris, poor people in the Middle Ages, and towns that we had passed through only once. Her mind moved quickly from one subject to another, and I followed as best I could.

Two years before the end, Florence and I drove from Biarritz to a place called Las Tours. It stood in a wild valley, with four old castles high above the road. The wind blew hard through the valley, and the grey leaves of the olive trees moved like hair. Rosemary grew among the dark rocks. Florence wished to see the place because it had a story, and she loved places that had stories.

She had been educated at Poughkeepsie, and she had learned a great many things. I never understood how she kept them all in her head. She would lift one hand, as if she wanted to stop any question, and then she would begin. She did not look romantic when she talked. She often did not even look at the person before her. But the words came quickly and brightly.

We often talked about going back to places we had seen. We talked about Beaucaire, Heidelberg, Hamelin, Verona, Carcassonne, and many other towns. But we almost never went back. Florence seemed to get everything she wanted from one look. I did not. The world remains for me full of places that I want to see again, but never shall.

For me those places are only spots of color in a very large picture. I remember white sunlight on stone, dark pine trees against blue sky, painted house fronts, grey and pink palaces, and old towns standing behind the sea. But I do not have strong roots in any of them. Perhaps, if I had seen them more than once, I should have something firm to hold now. As it is, they float in my mind like small broken

pieces.

Is this a wrong path away from the story? I do not know. You are sitting there, and you say nothing. But I am trying to make you see Florence. She seemed to dance through castles, across sea roads, through fine shops, and along bright beaches. She was like a moving light on a ceiling, reflected from water below. My work in life was to keep that light alive.

It was not easy work. The doctors had told me that Florence's heart might stop if she became too excited. So I had to protect her from strong feelings. I had to keep conversation away from love, poverty, crime, religion, and many other dangerous subjects. If anything might stir her deeply, I had to stop it. For twelve years I lived like a careful nurse.

That is why culture was useful. If Florence talked about old churches, old poems, or old kings, I felt safe. Her mind was busy, but her heart was not too much moved. Still, even culture could be dangerous, because it often came close to love and death. The story of Peire Vidal, for example, was one of those stories. It was both funny and full of love, and so it was not quite safe.

Peire Vidal was a poet, and he loved a lady who was called La Louve, the She-Wolf. She would not love him. To please her, he dressed himself in wolf skins and went into the mountains. The shepherds and their dogs thought he was a real wolf. They beat him and tore him badly before he was carried back to the castles.

The lady was not much moved by this. Her husband, however, thought a great poet should be treated with more respect. So he tried to make her show kindness to Peire. Peire then called himself an emperor and set out in a small boat to save the Holy Sepulchre. The boat struck a rock, and once more people had to rescue him.

That was the sort of story Florence liked. It was old, strange, learned, and rather foolish. She could tell it in a way that made it shine. Yet I always had to watch her, even while she spoke of such things. I had to ask myself whether she was laughing too much, or feeling too much, or growing too excited.

Florence's aunts used to think I was the laziest man in Philadelphia. They were old-fashioned New England women. When I first visited Florence in the old

wooden house at Stamford, they did not ask first how I was. They asked, “What do you do?” And I did nothing. I had money enough, and I saw no special reason to do anything.

I had first met Florence at a kind of literary tea in New York. I do not know why I went there. I do not know why she went there either. Perhaps she wished to improve the minds of the people there. She often wanted to leave the world a little better than she found it. Poor dear Florence, I have heard her lecture Edward for hours about painters, ancient statues, and many things that must have meant almost nothing to him.

Her Uncle John was a different kind of person. He was thin, gentle, and very lovable. He also believed that he had a weak heart, and his life became rather like Florence’s later life. He lived in Waterbury and owned a factory there. The factory made different things at different times: bone buttons, brass buttons, tin lids, and other small goods.

In truth, Uncle John did not want the factory to make anything. He wanted to rest. When he was seventy, he retired. But then the boys in the street pointed at him and called him the laziest man in Waterbury. This troubled him so much that he decided to travel around the world. Florence went with him, and so did a young man called Jimmy.

Jimmy’s duty was rather like my duty with Florence. He had to keep Uncle John away from dangerous subjects. In Uncle John’s case, politics was dangerous. The old man had strong political feelings, and argument might excite him. So Jimmy had to guide him away from such talk, just as I later had to guide Florence away from love, fear, and pain.

Before they left San Francisco, Uncle John decided that he must take gifts for people he met on the ship. He chose oranges, because California was famous for oranges. He also bought folding chairs, because he thought tired ladies might need them. So he filled space with boxes of oranges and kept the chairs ready in his cabin. It was a strange but kind idea.

Every morning he gave oranges to people on board. He gave them to anyone he knew even slightly. The oranges lasted all the way around the world. Once,

near the far north, he saw a lonely lighthouse and decided that the men there must need oranges too. So he had himself rowed out to them with some fruit.

He lent the folding chairs to ladies who seemed tired or weak. He was not showy about his kindness. He simply acted as if this was the natural thing to do. He went around the world with his niece beside him and with careful rules for his heart. In the end, the joke was that there was almost nothing wrong with his heart at all.

Uncle John died at eighty-four, only five days before Florence died. He died of bronchitis, not of heart disease. After his death, I inherited his money because Florence died just after him. I wish I had not. It gave me many duties, and I had to go to Waterbury to arrange matters. Uncle John had left money to charities, and I wanted the work handled properly.

While I was still dealing with these things, I received a strange cable from Edward Ashburnham. He asked me to come back and have a talk with him. Soon after that, another cable came from Leonora. She said, “Yes, please come. You could be very helpful.” It seemed as if Edward had sent his message first and told her later. In fact, something close to that had happened.

I came back as quickly as I could, but I arrived too late to help, if I could ever have helped at all. That was my first real taste of English country life. I shall never forget Edward driving beside me with a fine horse, polished and high-stepping, as we came down from the open land of the New Forest. The quiet of the place astonished me. After Waterbury, it seemed impossible that any real disaster could belong to such peace.

Branshaw House stood near Branshaw Teleragh, beautiful, old, and sure of itself. Leonora stood at the top of the steps with servants behind her. She was smiling, with her fair hair carefully arranged. She simply said, “I am so glad you have come,” as if I had come from a town ten miles away for lunch. I had crossed half the world because of urgent messages, and still the house seemed calm.

Nancy, the girl, was out with the hounds, I think. Edward sat beside me in terrible suffering. It was silent suffering, almost without a face or voice. He seemed to be in pain beyond words. Yet the house, the servants, Leonora’s smile,

and the country air all seemed to say that nothing truly terrible could happen there. That was the strange thing.

## Part 3 — The First Dinner at Nauheim

It was a very hot summer, in August 1904. Florence had already been taking the baths at Nauheim for a month. I was not a patient myself, so I cannot say what the place felt like to people who went there for a cure. Perhaps they found some kind of home there, because the bath attendants smiled, wore white, and seemed to know exactly what they were doing. But to me, Nauheim always felt bare and public, as if I were standing in an open place with no shelter.

At home, a man has small things that hold him to life. A chair seems to welcome him. A street corner seems friendly because he has passed it many times. But in a spa town, everything is clean, arranged, and shared by strangers. The gravel is carefully swept, the trees stand in tubs, and the people walk past at the proper hour. It all looks pleasant, but it does not belong to you.

Every morning I walked with Florence to the baths. She talked as we went, and of course her talk was always lively. When she entered the bathing place, I had nothing much to do until I came back to fetch her. So I fell into the habit of counting my steps. From one hotel to the fountain there were so many steps, and from another hotel there were so many more.

That will show you how empty my days were. I knew the town by the number of my steps, but not by love. I could have found the baths, the hot rooms, the water place, and the paths with my eyes shut. Yet I have forgotten the color of some of the buildings. I knew the distances, but I did not really live there.

Florence, on the other hand, seemed made for such a place. She walked lightly, dressed beautifully, and carried herself with bright confidence. I remember one dress especially, a blue silk dress with a Chinese pattern. It was full in the skirt and broad over the shoulders. Her hair was copper-colored, and her shoes had very high heels, so that she seemed almost to step on the points of her feet.

At the door of the bathing place, she sometimes turned back and smiled at me.

Her cheek seemed almost to touch her shoulder, and her blue eyes shone under the wide white hat she wore. The hat was tied with a scarf of the same cloth as her dress. Around her neck she wore simple pink beads. Her face was clear and smooth, and she knew very well how to make people notice her eyes.

But for whose benefit did she smile like that? Was it for me, for the bath attendant, or for some stranger passing by? I do not know. I only know that she never smiled at me like that at any other time. There was something playful and inviting in it, and it was not the smile of a wife to her husband. Florence was a riddle to me, though perhaps all women are riddles.

One evening, everything changed. I was in the dining room of the Hotel Excelsior, and I remember that room more clearly than I remember many castles and towns. It was white, cold, and expensive-looking. There were tall windows, many tables, and a black screen near the door with golden birds on it. In the middle of the room stood a palm tree, and waiters moved softly between the tables.

The people came in each evening with serious faces, as if eating dinner were part of the cure. They did not seem to be there for pleasure. They looked as if they were obeying the rules of the place. Then, one evening, in the soft light before dinner, Edward Ashburnham came around the screen and into the room. At once I noticed him.

The head waiter went to him and listened while Edward gave his name. I saw his lips form the words, and I knew who he was. Before dinner I had often looked at the little police forms that guests had to fill in when they arrived. So I knew he must be Captain Edward Ashburnham of Branshaw House. I had nothing better to do in those days than notice such small things.

The waiter led Edward to a table near ours. It was not a very good table, because the low sun shone straight on it. Edward seemed to notice this at once. His face, until then, had shown almost nothing. It had no joy, no fear, no boredom, and no surprise. It was the perfect calm face of an English gentleman.

He was fair, with hair carefully arranged across his forehead. His face was an even red color, and his yellow moustache was stiff and neat. His black evening jacket made him look broad and slightly bent at the shoulders. He had the air of a

man who knew about horses, boots, guns, saddles, and good soap. Later I hardly ever heard him speak of anything else.

Yet I should not say that Edward never spoke of serious things. Sometimes, late at night, he would say something about honor, loyalty, courage, or constancy. He spoke stiffly, but as if these words were very important to him. He believed deeply in such ideas. That was one of the strange things about him.

He was also a sentimental man. He liked novels in which poor girls married noblemen and love ended happily. He liked sad love stories too, and I have seen tears in his eyes when he read of a hopeless parting. He loved children, puppies, and weak people. So perhaps, when no other man was present, he had a great deal to say to women.

At that time, however, I did not know any of this. I knew only the outside of him. I knew his neat clothes, his cases, his riding talk, his honest blue eyes, and his calm manner. I knew that women noticed him when he entered a room. He seemed to gather their eyes without trying, as if it were the easiest thing in the world.

His eyes were very blue, and they looked honest and simple. But because his face and even his eyelids were so pink, the blue seemed almost strange and hard. He had a rough, low voice. There he stood by the table, while I sat with my back to the screen. Then I saw two looks pass over his eyes.

First, he seemed pleased and proud, as if he had suddenly seen something that belonged to him. His eyes did not really move, but their meaning changed. It was the look of a man who says, “There you are, my dear.” Then another look came, harder and more careful. It was the look of a man measuring a chance and thinking, “It might just be done.”

I turned and looked behind me. There stood Leonora Ashburnham, tall, bright, and smiling. Beside her was my wife, Florence, small, fair, and shining like sunlight on water. I did not understand then what Edward had seen. I did not understand the danger. I only saw two women coming into the dining room.

Leonora looked more cheerful at that moment than I ever saw her look afterward. Some English people, when they meet Americans they accept, seem to

become brighter than usual. It is as if they say to themselves that American women are lively, and they will not be beaten in liveliness. Leonora seemed to do just that. She called out to Edward from a little distance.

“Do not sit at that stuffy old table, Teddy,” she said. “Come and sit by these nice people.” It was an extraordinary thing to say about strangers. I could never have said it myself. But she said it easily, as if she had already decided what we were. To her, perhaps, we were safe, clean, harmless people, like friendly animals.

She sat down at a table near ours, though the head waiter tried to stop her. That table had been saved for another family. The waiter was troubled, because he wished to do his duty. He knew the other family would give him little money and much trouble. He also knew that Edward would give him a good English coin and cause almost no trouble at all. Still, he tried to keep the table.

Then Florence spoke. She said, in her bright American way, that we might all eat together at our table. Our table was round, and there was room for four. Edward made a small pleased sound in his throat. Leonora hesitated for only a moment, like a horse before a fence. Then she rose and sat down opposite me.

I never thought Leonora looked her best in evening dress. She often wore black, and her white shoulders seemed too clear and cold above it. She looked almost like a marble figure set in a dark vase. I loved Leonora always, and I would still give what remains of my life to serve her. But I never felt toward her the desire that men feel toward women.

To me, Leonora looked better in a blue walking dress. Then her golden hair was not made pale by her white shoulders. Other women draw a man’s eyes to their lips, neck, or body. Leonora drew the eyes to her wrist. There was often a small gold ring there, with a chain and a little key for a box.

When she sat opposite me, she looked at me fully for the first time. Her eyes were blue too, darker than Edward’s, and very clear. She seemed to study me as she might study a horse. I almost felt her questions passing through her mind. Was I safe with money? Would I try to make love? Would I talk too much about other people’s affairs?

Then her look changed. Warmth and kindness came into her eyes. It was a very

touching look, but also rather humiliating. She looked at me as a mother might look at a son, or a sister at a brother. It was as if she decided that I was harmless and perhaps a little weak.

From that day forward, she treated me almost as if I were the invalid, not Florence. On cold days she would bring me a rug. She trusted me, or at least she felt that she needed no wall against me. Perhaps her eyes had answered all her own questions. Perhaps they had answered them too well.

Then Florence said, “And so the whole round table is begun.” Edward again made that small sound in his throat. Leonora gave a little shiver, as if something cold had touched her. I was passing her the basket of rolls at that moment. And so, without our understanding it, our life together began.

## Part 4 — Nine Quiet Years and One Sharp Question

So began nine years of peace, or what looked like peace. The Ashburnhams told us almost nothing about themselves, and we told them almost nothing about ourselves. We did not speak much about private matters. We simply took many things for granted. We all believed that we were good people, and that seemed enough.

We took for granted what we liked to eat and drink. The men liked their beef not too well done, and a good drink after lunch. The women liked light wine mixed with water. We took for granted that we all had enough money for our usual pleasures. We could hire carriages and motor cars, give dinners, and still enjoy little acts of saving money.

Florence always had a London newspaper sent to her. She loved English things very much. I was satisfied with the Paris paper from New York. But when we found that the Ashburnhams also received the same London paper, Florence and Leonora made a practical plan. One year one woman would stop her copy, and the next year the other woman would stop hers.

There was also a Grand Duke who came every year to the baths. He used to dine with several families, one family at a time. Later he gave one large dinner for

all of them. These dinners cost money, because one had to invite the Grand Duke, some of his people, and sometimes important officials too. So Florence and Leonora decided that our two families could give one dinner together.

That dinner became a yearly event. It grew larger as time passed, until it almost marked the end of our season. We did not think of ourselves as people who wanted to be close to royalty. We had no such claim. We were only good people, and the Grand Duke was pleasant. It was agreeable to hear him speak of races, horses, and sometimes of the Emperor.

But when I look back, I cannot understand how we spent our time. Nine years passed, and what did I gain from them? Nothing that I can hold in my hand. Not even a small cheap thing from Nauheim. More than that, I did not gain much knowledge of people.

After forty-five years in the world, a man ought to know something about other human beings. Yet I could not tell whether the woman who sold flowers near the station was cheating me or not. I could not tell whether a porter in Italy was honest when he asked for money. Honest acts surprise me, and dishonest acts surprise me too. I have lived among people for many years, and still I do not understand them.

I think the habit of polite society is partly to blame. In that world, people take everyone for granted. A man or woman enters a hotel or a train, and from a few small signs you decide whether that person is one of the right people. It does not matter much whether they are English, German, French, Spanish, or American. If they follow the same rules, take cold baths, eat the same food, and move in the right circles, they are accepted.

I do not say that this life has no value. It can be a very high and careful way of living. But it also forces a person to accept many small things he may not like. You may eat food you dislike, drink what you do not want, and let people think you belong to a church you do not really belong to. You do all this because it is part of the system.

The trouble is that this system never takes you very deep. You learn what people eat, what they wear, and how they behave at dinner. You learn whether they have the right manners. But you do not learn what is going on inside them.

You do not learn what they fear, love, hide, or suffer.

I can give one clear example. I do not remember whether it happened in our first year together at Nauheim or in the second. That uncertainty itself shows how quickly our friendship seemed to grow. We could set out together on an excursion as if we had done such things for years. We seemed old friends, though we knew so little.

The place we visited was an old city, about fifty minutes away by train. It stood high on a dark rock above the valley of the Lahn. Roads wound around it like ribbons, and at the top stood a castle with sharp roofs and shining weathercocks. There were also old churches with two towers. Florence wished to take us there because the place had history.

Florence loved being a guide among old buildings. She could use a guidebook as easily as another person used a street map. She liked to show people where kings had slept, where soldiers had fought, and where someone had looked out of a window at some terrible event below. She did this only once with us in such a large way, but she did it magnificently. She had a special reason that day.

At that time Florence was trying to educate Edward. She would say to Leonora, “I cannot understand how you can live beside him and let him know so little.” Leonora always seemed to know more than she said. If Florence told a historical story, Leonora would nod quietly, as if she had known it all along. This troubled Florence very much, because she liked to be the teacher.

Leonora sometimes answered with dry humor. She would look at Edward and say that too much knowledge might hurt the hand he used with horses. Edward would blush and mutter that no one should trouble about him. Once he asked me seriously if too much learning might make a man slower at polo. I told him that he was not likely to learn enough to damage his balance.

Still, Edward seemed to enjoy Florence’s lessons. She told him about plays, music, religion, and American history. She did it in sudden bursts, not as a system. She seemed to be lighting up dark places in the world. Leonora and I watched, and everything seemed harmless enough. It even seemed useful, because it kept Florence busy and calm.

But the visit to that old city was a larger affair. Florence had found out that there was an important paper in the castle. She thought this paper would let her teach all of us at once. For several days before the visit, I had seen her reading serious history books. I knew that something special was coming, though I did not know what.

Until the strange moment came, I enjoyed the trip. I liked catching the afternoon train. I liked sitting by the clean window while the countryside moved past. The fields looked green, though the earth also showed red, purple, and brown. There were dark woods, small streams, animals, and bright clothes in the fields. For a little while I felt free from duty.

Florence was talking hard about old princes and religious quarrels. Leonora listened carefully. Edward listened in his simple, patient way. I was happy because Florence was safely busy with history. She could not, I thought, be doing anything dangerous while she was explaining such matters.

At one point I saw a brown cow push its horns under another cow and throw it into a stream. I burst out laughing, but no one noticed. Florence was too busy speaking, and Leonora was too busy listening. I know I should have felt pity for the animal, but I was in a good mood. The sight seemed so unexpected that I kept laughing quietly about it all day.

We reached the station and took an old carriage to the castle. Florence bargained with the driver, though I spoke German better than she did. We rode up proudly for five marks and no extra money. Then we went through the museum and saw old glass, old swords, old iron work, and many dark objects that belonged to the past. We climbed winding stairs and passed through great rooms.

At last we came to a high room filled with presses and heavy shutters. Florence became full of energy. She told the tired old guide which shutters to open. Sunlight came into the dark room in clear bright lines. She said that this had been Luther's bedroom, and that his bed had stood where the light now fell.

I believe she was probably wrong about that. Perhaps Luther had only stopped there for a short time. But Florence needed the room to be important, and so it became important. Then, against the guide's protest, she opened another shutter

and hurried back to a glass case. Her face was bright with victory.

"There it is," she cried. "The Protest." She pointed to a small paper with pale writing on it. To me it looked like a half sheet of a letter with a few notes written on it. But Florence was triumphant. She told us that this paper was the reason Protestants were called Protestants.

We all looked properly surprised, and she went on. She named Luther and other religious leaders, though I cannot now remember all the names correctly. She looked up into Edward's eyes as she spoke. "Because of that paper," she told him, "you are honest, sober, hard-working, careful, and clean in your life." She said that without it he would be like the Irish, the Italians, or the Poles, and especially like the Irish.

As she said this, she laid one finger on Edward's wrist. At that moment I felt that something dark had entered the day. I cannot describe it well. It was as if my heart missed a beat. I felt that all four of us might suddenly run in different directions, crying out and turning our faces away.

Edward's face showed pure fear. I myself was terribly frightened. Then I felt pain in my left wrist and realized that Leonora was holding it very tightly. "I cannot bear this," she said with great force. "I must get out of here." I thought, for one wild moment, that she must be jealous of Florence and Edward.

We almost fled down the winding stairs. We crossed the great painted hall and came out onto a small terrace above the valley. The river, the wide land, and the far plain lay below us. Leonora still held me as if she needed something to hold. I could hardly breathe.

"Do you not see?" she said. "Do you not see what is happening?" I stammered that I did not. I asked her what was wrong. She looked straight into my eyes, and her blue eyes seemed enormous. For a moment they seemed to shut out the whole world.

"Do you not see," she said bitterly, "that this is the cause of all the sorrow in the world?" She spoke of misery, sin, and the loss of innocent happiness. I do not remember all her words. I was too frightened and too amazed. I even thought of running for a doctor, or perhaps for Edward.

Then she asked where all the bright and happy people in the world had gone. Her hand moved over her forehead in a strange, painful way. Her eyes were wide, and her face looked as if she had seen something terrible. Then, all at once, she stopped. She became Mrs Ashburnham again, clear, calm, and controlled.

She looked away at a caravan moving over a little bridge far below us. Her golden hair was perfect, and her face was sharp and still. Her voice was clear and hard when she spoke. “Do you not know,” she said, “that I am an Irish Catholic?”

## Part 5 — Leonora’s Burden

Those words gave me the greatest relief I had ever felt. Leonora had said that she was an Irish Catholic. At once I understood that her pain was not, at least not simply, jealousy of Florence. I had been afraid that she had seen some private feeling between Florence and Edward. That thought had frightened me more than I can say. But religion seemed, for the moment, a safer kind of pain.

Her words also taught me something about myself. I do not think I had ever wanted many things very strongly, except Florence. I had been impatient about small matters, of course. I could be angry if a train connection was missed, or if a dish at dinner did not reach me in time. But these were little hungers and little angers. They were not deep desires.

At that time, I was most interested in people with weak hearts. Florence had one, or so I believed. Edward also had one, or so I believed then. Leonora and I seemed to have the same duty. We were, in my mind, two careful nurses trying to keep two dear patients alive.

Such a duty can fill a whole life. A baker thinks the world depends on his bread. A postman may think society depends on the letters he carries. In the same way, I thought that the world should arrange itself around Florence’s heart. I believed Leonora must feel the same about Edward. I thought she watched him as I watched Florence.

But I later learned that Edward had nothing wrong with his heart. He had left India and come to Nauheim not because he needed the cure, but because he was

following a woman who really was ill. That woman was Mrs Maisie Maidan. I did not know this then. I saw only a good soldier with a weak heart and a devoted wife beside him.

Edward and Leonora had needed to live cheaply. They should have stayed in India, saved money, and let Branshaw House bring in what it could. But Edward was sentimental and foolish in matters of women. He could not leave Maisie alone. So he crossed half the world after her, and Leonora had to follow him.

At that time I had never heard of the Kilsyte case. I learned about it only much later, when Leonora began to tell me the truth. The story was simple and ugly. Edward had kissed a servant girl in a railway train. Because of quick action and friendly people in the right places, he escaped prison and public ruin.

You may think this proves that Edward was a bad man. I cannot say that so simply. I have the right to speak hard words about him, because he was my wife's lover and because he helped destroy my life. Yet I still ask you to pity him. There was something unlucky, blind, and helpless in him.

The Kilsyte case came at a terrible time in his marriage. Leonora had already become cold to him, and he felt shut out from her heart. Then this public danger struck him. It shocked him deeply. After that, he left servant girls alone. That was one result of the case.

But it did not cure him of women. It only turned his weakness toward women of his own class. He still wanted to find one perfect woman who would save him. He still believed, each time, that this new woman would be the one to whom he could be faithful forever. That was part of his foolishness, but it was also part of his sadness.

Edward could speak about honor, loyalty, and duty, and he meant these words when he said them. He was not pretending. That was the strange thing. He wanted to be good, and in many public ways he was good. He helped poor people, protected weak people, and tried to act like a proper country gentleman. But his feelings drove him where his ideas could not guide him.

Leonora had to live beside all this. She had to hide what could be hidden, repair what could be repaired, and keep their name safe. She was proud, cold, and strong,

but she was not made of stone. She was a Catholic wife, and she believed marriage was a serious bond. She did not think she was free simply to leave Edward and begin again.

I did not understand that at the time on the castle terrace. I only knew that her words had saved me from a worse fear. If her pain came from religion, then perhaps Florence was not involved. That was what I wanted to believe. I wanted our four lives to go on as before.

Yet Leonora's religion was not a small matter to her. It was not just a name or a custom. It was a law inside her. It told her what she could do and what she could not do. It made divorce seem impossible, and it made her duty to Edward terrible and endless.

I confess that I did not like her religion. I had old American feelings about such things, and I could not help them. But I liked Leonora very much. More than that, I felt safe with her. She had looked at me with kindness, and I believed she was fond of me in her own calm way.

So on the terrace I tried to help. I spoke quickly and perhaps foolishly. I wanted to take the sharpness out of Florence's words about Catholics and the Irish. I wanted Leonora to accept the situation and not break our little group apart. I wanted peace to return before Edward and Florence came down from the castle.

She watched me while I spoke. Her look was steady and strange, as if she were measuring me again. I told her that I did not like her religion, but that I liked her deeply. I said that I had never had many people to be fond of. I also said that I believed she was fond of me.

"I am fond enough of you," she said. "Fond enough to wish that every man were like you." Then she added that there were other people to think about. At the time I did not understand whom she meant. Later I knew that she was thinking of poor Maisie Maidan. Even then Maisie stood between Leonora and peace.

Leonora picked a small green plant from the wall in front of us. She rubbed it slowly between her fingers. Then she threw it away over the stone edge. At last she said that she would accept the situation, if I could. Those words sounded calm, but they carried a heavy weight.

What she was accepting was not only Florence's foolish speech. She was accepting another long season of watching Edward. She was accepting the need to smile at dinner, to speak gently, and to hide fear behind good manners. She was accepting me and Florence as part of her life because she needed to keep us near. She needed to see what we saw and know what we knew.

I did not see any of this then. I was simply grateful that the terrible moment had passed. I thought the danger had been a misunderstanding caused by religion and tactless words. I did not know that Leonora was already carrying years of shame, anger, debt, and fear. I did not know that Edward's past was following him like a dark shadow.

Nor did I know how carefully Leonora had been managing his life. Money had been lost. Debts had appeared. Secrets had been hidden from her and then dragged into the light. Each time, she had to act quickly, speak to lawyers, protect property, and keep the outside world from laughing at them.

Edward made this work harder because he was ashamed. He did wrong, but he hated telling Leonora about it. He seemed to think that speaking of ugly things would stain her mind. So he hid matters until hiding them became more dangerous than telling them. Then Leonora had to discover the truth by force.

This was the burden behind her clear face and careful voice. She had to be wife, guard, manager, judge, and nurse, all at once. She had to keep Edward respectable, even when he was not safe. She had to keep Branshaw alive, even when Edward's kindness and weakness were destroying it. She had to keep her marriage, even when marriage had become a prison.

And there, on that sunny terrace above the valley, I understood almost none of it. I saw only a beautiful woman who had been hurt by my wife's careless words. I wanted to calm her, and I believed I had done so. Edward and Florence would soon return, and we would go on with the day. That was what I thought, because I still knew nothing.

## Part 6 — Maisie Maidan

I remember laughing a little at Leonora's words, "accept the situation." She had said them so seriously that I thought she was making too much of the matter. I told her that Florence must be free to think what she liked about Catholics, just as I was free to think what I liked. I also said that Florence would say only what good manners allowed her to say. At the time, I thought this was a fair and simple answer.

Leonora's face became hard. "She had better not say one word against my people or my faith," she said. Her voice had a sharpness that I had not heard before. It was almost like a warning sent through me to Florence. But I could not believe that one good woman would truly threaten another. So I changed the warning into something softer when I later spoke to Florence.

I told Florence that Leonora was sensitive about her religion. I said it would be better not to speak against Catholics in front of her. That was all. And from that moment until after Florence, Edward, and the girl were all dead, I never had the smallest suspicion that anything was wrong. For five minutes at the castle I had wondered if Leonora was jealous. After that, the thought disappeared.

How could I have known? I was only a male nurse, watching over my wife's supposed heart. The others were much better players than I was. Leonora, Edward, and Florence all had things to hide, and they hid them from me. They were three against one, though I did not know there was any game at all. And they made me happy. That is the terrible part. They made me very happy.

Now I understand that I was a deceived husband. I suppose Leonora was helping Edward and Florence keep their secret, though she hated doing it. That was one of the crosses she carried. I ask myself how it feels to be such a husband, and the answer is strange. It feels like nothing. There is no fire, no thunder, no great cry. There is only a blank place.

Sometimes, at night, I imagine them all before God. I see Florence alone, and Edward close to another poor lost soul. I know that such pictures are foolish, perhaps taken from some painting I once saw. Yet they come to me. When I see Florence alone in that wide, cold space, part of me wants to run to her and comfort her. I had nursed her for twelve years. A nurse does not stop being a nurse in one

day.

But then hatred holds me back. Florence should not have done what she did. She did not have some great burning excuse. She was not driven by the hot blood of a tragic woman in an old story. She was a clever, vain American woman who wanted to play a great part. She took Edward from Leonora, and then she tried to improve the marriage she herself had broken.

That was one of the strangest and worst things. While Florence was Edward's lover, she kept talking to Leonora about forgiveness. She said that Leonora should be kind to him and give him another chance. She said Edward needed tenderness more than anything. She spoke as if she were doing a good work in the world. She still wanted to leave life a little brighter than she found it.

Leonora bore this for years. Sometimes she answered with cold anger. Once, in the early morning, she told Florence, "You come to me from his room and tell me that my place is beside him. I know my place, thank you." But even that did not stop Florence. Florence could always find a way to explain herself. She said her love for Edward was pure because of her weak heart.

Once Florence even compared herself with Maisie Maidan. She asked why Leonora could believe that Maisie's feeling for Edward had been innocent, but could not believe the same of her. Leonora was doing her hair before a mirror when Florence said this. She turned and looked at Florence very coolly. Then she said that Florence must never again speak Mrs Maidan's name.

"You killed her," Leonora said. "You and I killed her between us. I am no better than you. I do not like to be reminded of it." Florence began to protest at once. She said she had hardly known Maisie, and that she had tried to save her from Edward. In Florence's own mind, this may even have seemed true. She could turn almost anything into a good action if she told the story in her own way.

Leonora answered more patiently after that. She said they might put the matter another way, if Florence wished. They might say that Leonora herself had killed Maisie, and that the subject was painful. A person did not like to remember that she had killed someone. Then she added that she should never have brought Maisie from India. That was how Leonora truly saw it.

I must now go back and explain how Maisie came to be with them. Edward had fallen in love with her in India, or at least he had fallen into one of his deep sentimental fevers. He was still writing letters to another woman, Mrs Basil, but he began to watch doors and paths for Maisie. He grew restless if he did not see her. He disliked her young husband for hours at a time, though the poor young man had done him no wrong.

Edward became thin and feverish. He rose early so that he might have time later to walk with Maisie. He began to use little words that she used, and he gave those words a special meaning in his heart. All this happened almost before he knew it. Then came a terrible hot day in India. He was standing in a darkened room, waiting for dinner. Leonora lay tired and still in a chair.

Suddenly Edward heard himself speak. “Could we take Mrs Maidan with us to Europe,” he asked, “and leave her at Nauheim?” He had not planned to say it. The words seemed to come out of his pain by themselves. He was thinking that he and Leonora would soon return to Branshaw, while Maisie would remain behind and perhaps die. The thought made him shake with fear and desire.

Leonora did not move. She only said that she had already promised Maisie’s husband that she would do it. She had even offered to pay the cost herself. Edward was deeply shocked. He had no idea how much Leonora knew about Maisie, Mrs Basil, or the earlier woman who had ruined their money. It seemed to him that Leonora was beginning to manage his loves as she managed his money.

And Leonora had managed his money very well. She had saved the estate, paid debts, and made careful plans. She told Edward that he should leave the army and return with her to Branshaw. She said this was the great day of her life, because she had repaired so much of the ruin. Edward praised her, but his mind was on Maisie. He saw only the mountains, sea, and wide plains that might soon stand between them.

For a week he suffered terribly at the thought of leaving Maisie behind. Yet when Leonora arranged to take Maisie with them, Edward still hated her, because at that time he hated almost everything she did. Their marriage was in a horrible state. But on the sea voyage to Europe, the cool air helped him. Money, comfort,

and Maisie's company made him feel better. Once, as he stood beside Leonora on deck, he told her that she was the finest woman in the world and that he wished they could be better friends.

Leonora only turned away and went to her cabin. Still, in her heart, she hoped. She watched Edward with Maisie and believed that the feeling between them had not become physically wrong. Maisie was truly ill, unlike the others who only used illness for their own reasons. Her heart was really weak. A strong embrace might have killed her.

At Nauheim, Leonora tried to understand the situation. She saw that Maisie was a kind woman and that she seemed good for Edward. She also saw Edward begin, in a small way, to come back toward her. He noticed her dresses. He made little jokes. He touched her shoulder. These were very small signs, but for Leonora they were precious.

Then came the day in the castle. Florence put her hand on Edward's wrist, and Leonora saw the look in his eyes. She knew that look. She had seen many women try to draw Edward's attention, but this was different. She despised Florence, and she suddenly feared that Maisie truly loved Edward and would be broken by him. That was why Leonora seized my wrist and dragged me down the stairs. She was not only angry. She was afraid for Maisie.

## Part 7 — The Death of Maisie

I must be fair to Leonora, because this matter was not simple. She did not believe that Maisie had been Edward's mistress. I do not believe it either. Maisie's heart was truly weak, and any strong physical feeling might have killed her. That is the plain truth. She was the real weak-hearted woman, while Florence and Edward were only playing at weakness for their own reasons.

Leonora was fond of Maisie in a strange and troubled way. She saw that Maisie was young, pretty, gentle, and almost helpless. She also saw that Maisie made Edward softer and happier. That hurt her, because Leonora had spent years trying to do good things for Edward, and he never seemed to see them. But when another

woman was kind to him, he accepted it at once.

There were moments when Leonora almost gave way. She nearly told Maisie's husband what was happening. She nearly told Edward what she thought of him. She nearly opened the whole matter to the world and let shame fall where it would. But she had been trained to keep silent, and silence was one of the laws of her life.

Then another trouble came. Leonora had opened one of Edward's letters because his affairs were so dangerous that she felt she had a right to know them. The letter came from a man who was asking Edward for money. It concerned an old love affair and a possible public scandal. Leonora was terrified, not only because of that one payment, but because she feared there might be many others hidden behind it.

That afternoon she had a painful talk with Edward. They had hardly spoken privately for years, except about trains, servants, or small arrangements. Now she had to speak to him about money, lies, and shame. Edward said that he had hidden the matter because he had not wanted her mind to be touched by such ugly things. He also said that there was no other secret debt of that kind.

For once, he was telling the truth. He went out to the post office and sent a coded message to his lawyer. He told the lawyer to answer the man strongly and to threaten legal action if the demands continued. In his simple way, Edward had decided that Leonora had suffered enough. If public trouble came, he would face it himself.

But he made one mistake. He did not tell Leonora where he was going. She saw him go to his room to get the code for the message. Some time later, she saw Maisie come out of that same room. Leonora believed that, while she had been suffering in silence, Edward had been with Maisie in the worst possible way. That was more than she could bear.

Leonora met Maisie in the corridor before dinner. They were near a screen, and no one else was there. Leonora struck Maisie across the face. It was not only anger at Maisie. It was anger at Edward, at herself, at marriage, at money, at shame, and at the whole cruel shape of life. Poor Maisie stood there pale and shocked, with the red mark on her cheek.

Then Florence came around the screen and found them. Leonora's little gold key, which hung from her wrist, had caught in Maisie's dark hair. No one spoke. Florence had to free the key, because Leonora was too sick at heart to touch Maisie again. The scene was small, almost silent, and horrible.

As soon as Florence appeared, Leonora controlled herself. She said that she had only been trying to put Maisie's comb straight. It was an absurd explanation, but good manners covered it for the moment. Maisie was not strong enough to answer. She gave one broken sob and went away down the corridor.

Leonora then tried to act as if nothing had happened. She opened the door of Edward's room in a clear and public way, so that Florence could hear her call him by name. She wanted Florence to think that she and Edward were still close. But Edward was not there. At that moment Leonora forgot herself and cried out, "How terrible! Poor little Maisie!"

She stopped herself at once, but it was too late. Florence had heard enough to know that there was something strange between Leonora, Edward, and Maisie. From that day Florence began to know more. She had seen the blow, the caught key, the false explanation, and Leonora's sudden fear. It was one more piece of knowledge in Florence's hands.

Later, Leonora herself went to Maisie's room. She went there because she was already ashamed and full of pity. She wanted to comfort the child. She wanted to make some repair, if repair was still possible. But when she entered the room, the first thing she saw was a letter on a table covered with red cloth.

The letter was for Leonora. Maisie had written it in great pain. She said that she had trusted Leonora, and that she had just learned the truth. She had heard Edward and the American lady talking in the hall. She had heard that Leonora had paid for her to come to Europe. She felt bought, used, and betrayed.

Maisie wrote that she was going straight back to her husband, Bunny. She said she had not known that Leonora had wanted her to become a bad woman. She had believed that, if Leonora thought the situation was safe, then it must be safe. They had come from the same convent world, and Maisie had trusted that. Now she felt that trust had been destroyed.

There was another wound in the letter. Maisie had heard Edward call her a poor little rat. In private, that name had been a soft name between them, and she had not minded it. But if Edward used it while speaking to Florence, it meant something different. It meant that he no longer loved her in the same way. That thought seems to have struck her heart more deeply than anything else.

Leonora screamed when she read the letter. Then she looked around and saw that the room was almost empty. Maisie's things were packed. The table was clear, and the hooks held no clothes. There was a strange silence in the room, as if even small sounds had been swallowed. Leonora understood that Maisie had meant to leave at once.

She began to search the hotel. The manager said that Mrs Maidan had paid her bill and had gone to ask about the journey back to India. He thought she might have returned, but he was not sure. No one had troubled much about the poor child. She had been moving through that large hotel alone, hurt, frightened, and ashamed.

Leonora went through the public rooms: the dining room, the lounge, the writing room, and the winter garden. Panic was rising in her, though she still kept the outside of herself cool. She had now decided what she must do. She would take Maisie away from that hateful place. She would leave Edward to Florence and to me, and she would give all her care to Maisie until the girl could return safely to her husband.

But it was too late. Leonora went back upstairs to Maisie's rooms. This time she looked more carefully. Beyond the bed she saw a small pair of feet in high-heeled shoes. Maisie had died while trying to fasten a large trunk. Her body had fallen forward into it, and the trunk had closed partly over her.

The key was still in her hand. Her dark hair had fallen down and covered her face and body. Leonora lifted her, and she was as light as a child. She laid her on the bed and spread her hair around her. Maisie's face was peaceful, and there was even a little smile on her lips.

You must understand that Maisie had not killed herself. Her heart had simply stopped. Later I saw her lying there, with her long lashes on her cheeks and flowers around her. A white lily rested in her hand and lay across her shoulder.

With candles near her and two nuns kneeling at her feet, she looked almost like a young bride.

Leonora showed her to me, but she would not let Edward or Florence see her. She wanted to spare Edward, because he could not bear to look at the dead. She also never told him about Maisie's letter. So Edward believed that Maisie's death had come naturally and quietly, without any special cause. He soon recovered from it. Indeed, it was the one affair of his life about which he felt very little guilt.

## Part 8 — Florence Before Marriage

Mrs Maidan died on the fourth of August, 1904. After that, nothing seemed to happen until the fourth of August, 1913. The date is strange, because the fourth of August was always important in Florence's life. I do not know whether this was chance, or whether Florence herself gave the date a secret power in her own mind. She was a little superstitious, and perhaps she moved toward certain acts because the day seemed to call her.

Florence had been born on the fourth of August. On that date in 1899, she set out with Uncle John on the journey around the world. That was not really chance, because the trip was his birthday present to her when she came of age. On the fourth of August, 1900, something happened with the young man called Jimmy. That act colored all her life afterward, and mine too, though I did not know it then.

On the fourth of August, 1901, Florence married me. We sailed for Europe that same day, in a great wind. That was the storm which, I believed for years, damaged her heart. I suppose she was giving herself another birthday present then. She was giving herself my whole poor life, though I did not understand the gift I was making.

I have not yet told you properly how I married Florence. I first met her in New York, at the house of the Stuyvesants. From that moment I decided to marry her. I had no work and no business to keep me anywhere else. So I went to Stamford and stayed in a bad hotel, simply in order to be near her.

The Misses Hurlbird did not like my presence. They were Florence's aunts,

and they were proper, anxious, old-fashioned women. But the manners of the time made it hard for them to shut me out. Florence had her own sitting room, and she could receive whom she liked there. So I went in, took off my hat, sat down, and waited.

I was timid in most things, but in this one matter I was stubborn. Other young men also came to see Florence. They were strong young New England men who worked in New York during the day and returned to Stamford in the evening. They came in with almost as much purpose as I did. The aunts disliked them too, but they could not easily stop them.

Those poor aunts were strange people. They seemed like gentlewomen from an older world, living under some shadow. They were proper, soft-spoken, and always sighing. Sometimes I saw tears in their eyes. I did not then know what they feared, but I felt that they carried some family sorrow which they could not speak aloud.

My courtship did not move very quickly at first. It took place mostly in the heat of July afternoons. Dust lay in the streets, and the thin leaves of the elm trees hardly moved. I never even kissed Florence. Yet in two weeks she let me understand clearly what she wanted from life.

Florence wanted to marry a gentleman who did not work. She wanted a home in Europe. She wanted a husband with an English manner, a good income from property, and no strong wish to make more money. She also seemed to want a marriage with very little physical passion. She did not say these things in one speech, but she gave them out little by little in her bright talk.

She spoke of Venice, old English houses, Paris dresses, and country families. In the middle of such talk, she would drop a sentence about the kind of husband she wished for. She had once spent two months in Great Britain, and that visit had fixed her mind. She wanted a year in Paris after marriage. Then she wanted her husband to buy land near Fordingbridge, the place from which the Hurlbirds had once come.

This pleased me very much. I could not see any man in Stamford who fitted her plan better than I did. Most of the young men had less money than I had. Those

who had enough money were tied to business and would never leave Wall Street for Florence's dream of English country life. So I felt hopeful, though she had not yet promised me anything.

On the first of August, Florence apparently told her aunts that she meant to marry me. She had not told me, but the aunts knew. That afternoon, the older Miss Florence Hurlbird stopped me before I reached Florence's sitting room. She took me into the parlor in great distress. The room was old-fashioned, with delicate furniture, small portraits, and the smell of lavender.

The two ladies were suffering deeply, but they could not speak directly. They asked whether I had considered differences of character. They almost begged me to think carefully. In their way, they even seemed concerned for me. It was as if they believed Florence was too bright, too restless, and too dangerous for my solid and quiet nature.

They had decided that I had serious virtues. Perhaps this was because I had once said that I preferred General Braddock to General Washington. The Hurlbirds had taken the losing side in the War of Independence, and the memory still mattered to them. That remark may have made them think well of me. But even so, they were terrified by the thought that Florence and I would live in Europe.

To them, Europe was a dangerous place. They believed it was full of loose ways and hidden sins. They tried to warn me, but they were too refined to say exactly what they meant. They almost said that marriage was sacred. They almost said that Florence had had dangerous flirtations. But each time they stopped before the clear words came out.

At last I ended the painful talk rather foolishly. I said, "I do not care. If Florence has robbed a bank, I am still going to marry her and take her to Europe." At that, Miss Emily cried out and fainted. The elder Miss Florence threw herself on my neck and begged me not to do it. She said I was a good young man, and then she added, "We ought to tell you more. But she is our dear sister's child."

I left the room and went to find Florence. She received me with a very pale face. "Have those old cats been saying anything against me?" she asked. I told her

that they had not. Then I hurried her into the room to help her poor aunt. For many years I forgot that question of Florence's, or I explained it as the fear of a sensitive girl.

That evening I came to take Florence for a drive, but she had disappeared. I did not waste time. I went to New York and booked places on the ship Pocahontas, which was to sail on the evening of the fourth. Then I returned to Stamford and followed the trail. I learned that Florence had gone to Rye Station, and from there to Waterbury.

Of course she had gone to Uncle John. When I arrived, the old man received me with a hard, troubled face. He said that Florence was ill and could not see me. From something he said, I understood that the whole family did not want her to marry at all. They seemed determined to keep her away from marriage forever.

I acted at once. I found the nearest minister. I also found a rope ladder, because such things were arranged very simply in those days in America. At one o'clock in the morning on the fourth of August, I was standing in Florence's bedroom. I was so fixed on marrying her that it did not even occur to me that my being there was improper. I only wanted to wake her and take her away.

Florence was frightened at first, but she did not send me away. I spoke to her quietly and told her that I had booked the ship. She asked whether I truly meant to sail that afternoon. She seemed almost fierce about it. She wanted to know whether I had really taken the places, and whether I was lying. I assured her that we would sail on the Pocahontas.

She kept me waiting at the foot of the ladder for a long time. It must have been almost three in the morning before we reached the minister's house. Perhaps that long wait was the only sign that she felt any struggle of conscience about me. Perhaps, if I had shown more passion then, she would have become a true wife to me, or else sent me away forever. But I behaved like a calm Philadelphia gentleman, and so she let me become the careful nurse she wanted.

Just before she came down the ladder, she called me up again. The moon was shining over the hills around Waterbury, and the whole place looked quiet and peaceful. She whispered that she needed to know about the ship so that she could

pack her trunks. Then she added, almost coldly, that she might be ill. Her heart, she said, might be like Uncle Hurlbird's, because such things ran in families.

I told her that the Pocahontas was a very steady ship. I did not understand then what had entered her mind during those two hours of waiting. Perhaps the sight of Uncle John had given her the idea. Perhaps her aunt had spent hours speaking about weak hearts and the danger of strong feeling. In any case, Florence had now found the story that would rule my life. She stepped over the window-sill as if she were stepping onto a boat, and I helped her down into the night.

## Part 9 — The False Heart

After Florence stepped down from the window, our strange marriage truly began. We went back to the Hurlbird house at eight in the morning, already married. The aunts and Uncle John were almost too tired and shocked to speak. Florence looked hard and proud, as if she had won something. I was dazed and could say little except that I was happy.

We had breakfast together in that unhappy house. Then Florence went upstairs to pack her bags. Uncle John took the chance to warn me about Europe. He spoke for a long time, in a grand American way, about the dangers waiting for young American women in Paris and other old cities. He believed that Europe was full of hidden traps. I listened with respect, but I had already made my choice.

We reached the ship early in the afternoon. A great storm was blowing, and that helped Florence with her plan. We had not been long away from land when she went down to her cabin. Soon a worried stewardess came to find me. Florence, she said, was having trouble with her heart. I hurried down, frightened and full of guilt.

From that moment, Florence began to teach me how I must care for her. The ship's doctor also spoke to me quietly. He advised me not to show too much affection, because strong emotion might be dangerous for her. I accepted this at once. I thought I had taken a sick young woman from her family and carried her into danger.

I also thought I now understood why the Hurlbirds had tried to stop the marriage. They had known about Florence's heart, I believed, but had been too refined to speak plainly. They could not say that a husband must not kiss his wife, or that ordinary married life might kill her. That seemed to explain everything. It did not occur to me that the explanation itself had been made for me.

Florence's heart did make small strange sounds, rather like Uncle John's. She had heard many doctors speak about hearts during her travels with him. So she knew enough to make her story sound possible. The doctors accepted it, or at least they did not fight it. Between Florence, Jimmy, and the doctors, I was tied down very completely.

Jimmy met us at Havre. He was the young man who had gone around the world with Florence and Uncle John. He was dark, silent, heavy, and unpleasant to me. He wished to be a painter, but I do not think he had much talent. Yet he became useful to Florence, and for nearly two years he was always near our Paris flat, whether we were there or not.

Jimmy helped shape the rules of my married life. Florence needed sleep, he said. She needed quiet and privacy. I must never enter her room without knocking, because a sudden shock might stop her heart. Florence gently agreed with him. So every night at ten o'clock her door closed, and every morning at ten o'clock she came out fresh, dressed, and bright.

Her door was locked because she was afraid of thieves. Still, there was a special alarm cord near her wrist, so that she could wake the house if she needed help. I was also given an axe to break down the door if she did not answer after I knocked loudly. At the time, all this seemed careful and wise. Looking back, I see how perfectly the prison was built around me.

The worst part was the rule about England. Jimmy made me believe that Florence must never cross the Channel. The memory of the storm, he said, might kill her. Later, when Florence wished to go to Fordingbridge and see the country of her ancestors, I refused at once. I was firm because I thought I was saving her life. In this way, her own lie shut the door she most wanted to open.

Florence's great dream had been to become a lady in the English countryside.

She wanted to live near Fordingbridge, where her family had once belonged. But she could not suddenly announce that her heart was cured, because then the locked room and the rules of privacy would end. She was trapped by the very story that had protected her. By 1903 she was tired of Jimmy, but by then Edward Ashburnham had entered her life.

Edward could have given her the English world she wanted. He could not give her Branshaw House, because that belonged to Leonora's place in the marriage. But with our money, and with his name and position, Florence could have played a grand part near Fordingbridge. Uncle John had given her much of his money after I sent him good reports of her married life. We had enough money to shine almost anywhere.

I never knew exactly how Florence and Edward got rid of Jimmy. I imagine Edward frightened him or struck him, and I cannot feel much pity for the man. Jimmy had used Florence, and Florence had used him. They had both used me. If Florence and Jimmy had truly loved each other, perhaps I would have helped them live together somewhere. I cannot be sure, but I think I might have done it.

In truth, Florence did not seem to love Jimmy deeply. She was afraid. She was afraid of me, though I never knew it. This fear began before we left America. Florence had given me a small leather bag and said that her life depended on it, because it held her heart medicine. I gave the bag to Julius, my old servant, to carry.

Julius dropped it by accident. I became terribly angry and behaved badly. I shouted at him and struck him. Florence saw the scene, and it gave her a dark idea of my character. She believed that, if I learned the truth about her past, I might kill her. So she used the heart attack on the ship as soon as she could. Perhaps, in her fear, she was not wholly to blame.

That was the situation: an ignorant husband, a frightened and false wife, and a lover who could threaten her. Then another lover came. Edward Ashburnham was worth wanting, and I do not say that lightly. I have told you many things against him, but he was also brave, kind, generous, and useful in the world. He helped poor people with great patience. He could not bear to see a child cry.

I did not understand his goodness fully until Nancy Rufford came into the story. Nancy was Leonora's ward, the daughter of Leonora's only close friend. She had lived with the Ashburnhams since she was thirteen, after her mother's terrible death. Edward always called her "the girl." She loved Edward and Leonora with a pure and trusting heart.

Nancy spoke to me for long hours about Edward. She told me about his medals, his courage, his soldiers, and the men he had saved from the sea. To her, he was almost a hero from an old story. Edward himself would never speak that way. If I asked him about some honor he had received, he would joke and make it sound unimportant.

Because of Nancy, I began to ask myself whether Edward was truly as splendid as she believed. At last I asked Leonora directly. I said that, in all public duties, Edward seemed to be a very fine man. Leonora looked at me with a strange, waking expression. Then she said that, along those lines, there could not be a better man on earth.

I answered lightly that those were the only lines that mattered. I added that surely she would not say he was a bad husband or a bad guardian to Nancy. Leonora looked at me for a long time. Then she said slowly that she was not going to say he was not the best of husbands, or that he was not very fond of the girl. Later she told me that those words of mine first gave her a faint fear of the tragedy that was coming.

## Part 10 — The Last Day at Nauheim

Let me return to where we were. The conversation with Leonora about Edward had taken place on the fourth of August, 1913. I remember telling her that, on that same date nine years before, we had first met the Ashburnhams. So it seemed almost natural for me to speak well of Edward. I said that, after nine years of traveling, eating, walking, and sitting with them, I had not one complaint to make of either Edward or Leonora.

I meant every word of it. You must not think that we saw them only at Nauheim.

That would not have suited Florence at all. Florence liked movement, visits, and plans. So Edward came with us to Paris in September 1904, only a month after our first meeting, and stayed with us for several weeks. He came again that December, and it was probably then that he dealt with Jimmy.

I do not know exactly what happened between Edward and Jimmy. I have said that Edward may have struck him, and that seems likely enough. Florence may even have asked Edward to come to Paris for that purpose. In any case, Jimmy disappeared from our daily life after that. Edward took his place, though I did not understand this for years.

In 1905 Edward came to Paris several times. Once he came with Leonora, who wanted dresses. In 1906 we spent much of six weeks together at Mentone, and Edward stayed with us in Paris on his way back to London. This was how our lives went on. We moved from place to place, and the Ashburnhams entered those movements as naturally as if they had always belonged there.

Poor Edward had found in Florence a much harder master than Leonora. Leonora wanted to keep him because he was her husband, and because her religion and pride told her that she must not lose him. Florence wanted him because he belonged to the world she wanted. He was the owner of the house and name that stood near the old home of her ancestors. In that sense, he was almost the door into her dream.

I do not doubt that Edward was at first a passionate lover. But I am sure he became tired of Florence after a few years. She was not easy to escape. If Leonora mentioned in a letter that a woman was staying at Branshaw, Florence would send a desperate coded message to Edward. She would order him to come to her and prove that he was still faithful. She held over him the danger of telling me everything.

Perhaps Edward might have faced that danger and broken with her. But Leonora also held power over him. Leonora told him that, if the truth ever reached me, she would punish him in every way she could. She was determined to save my feelings, and she knew many ways to hurt him. The strongest way, at that time, was to refuse ever to see him again. That alone would have been enough to terrify

him.

Florence demanded more and more from Edward as the years went on. She made him show affection at strange times and in unsafe places. She even talked of telling me the whole truth, divorcing me, and going away with Edward to California. I do not think she truly meant it. Such a plan would have destroyed her hope of entering English country life. Still, Edward believed that she might do it.

Florence also believed, wrongly, that Leonora was ill. She would urge Leonora, even in front of me, to see a doctor. This was one of her ways of preparing the future. If Leonora died, Florence could imagine herself taking the place she wanted. If Leonora lived, Florence could still speak as if she were anxious and kind. It was a useful part for her to play.

Now I come to the last day of my complete ignorance. I assure you that, until that day, I was happy. The arrival of the girl had not troubled me. In fact, her presence made the house of our friendship seem warmer and more alive. I did not know that she had brought with her the beginning of the last disaster.

On the fourth of August, 1913, I was sitting in the hotel lounge with an unpleasant Englishman named Bagshawe. He had arrived too late for dinner. Leonora had gone upstairs to bed. I was waiting for Florence, Edward, and the girl to come back from a concert at the Casino. The evening was still and hot outside, but inside the lounge it was cool.

They had not all gone to the concert together at first. Florence had said that she would stay with Leonora and me. Edward and the girl had gone out alone. Then Leonora, very calmly, had asked Florence to follow them. She said that the girl ought to look as if she had a proper older woman with her when she was seen with Edward in such places. She added, quietly, that the time had come.

So Florence went after them in her light way. She was dressed in black because of some family death, for Americans are careful about such matters. Leonora and I remained in the lounge until about ten o’clock. Then Leonora went to bed. Bagshawe had been reading The Times on the other side of the room, but after she left, he moved toward me.

He began with some small question about the tax paid by visitors at the baths.

I think he wanted to know whether it could be avoided. That already told me much about him. He was the kind of man who tries to make friends by finding a common complaint. There was something oily and uneasy in his manner.

Bagshawe had a military look, but it seemed too strong, as if he had arranged it for effect. His eyes were round and pushed forward, but they avoided yours. His face was pale in an unpleasant way. He looked like a man who wanted company very badly, yet made decent people wish to move away. I disliked him almost at once.

He told me that he came from Ludlow Manor, near Ledbury. The name sounded slightly familiar, but I could not remember why. Then he tried several subjects, hoping one of them would interest me. He spoke about hops, taxes, California, and Los Angeles. He was fishing for a way into my good opinion.

Then, all at once, through the bright light from the street, I saw Florence running. I saw her as clearly as I see this page. Her face was whiter than paper, and one hand was pressed against the black cloth over her heart. For a moment my own heart seemed to stop. I could not rise or even move my hand.

Florence rushed through the swing doors into the lounge. She looked around the room with wild eyes. She saw me first, and her lips opened as if she wanted to speak. Then she saw Bagshawe beside me. At once she put both hands over her face, as if she wanted to push her own eyes back into darkness.

Then she was gone. She moved so quickly that the room seemed empty after her, though Bagshawe was still standing there. I sat without moving. I could not think. I only knew that something terrible had passed before me, and that I had not understood it quickly enough to stop it.

Bagshawe looked after her and said, “Good heavens, that is Florry Hurlbird.” His voice had an ugly little laugh in it. He turned to me, trying to make this knowledge into a kind of friendly gift. Then he asked whether I knew who she was. I think I stared at him without any expression at all.

He said that the last time he had seen that girl, she had been coming out of Jimmy’s bedroom at five o’clock in the morning. It had happened in his house near Ledbury. Then he added that she had recognized him just now. He stood over

me while he said it. Perhaps, at last, he understood that he had said something too dreadful. He made a small broken sound and muttered a few words of apology.

Those were the last words I ever heard from Mr Bagshawe. For a long time I sat where I was. I do not know how long. At last I pulled myself out of the chair and went upstairs to Florence's room. For the first time in all our married life, the door was not locked.

She was lying on the bed, carefully and properly arranged. It was not like poor Maisie, who had fallen half into the trunk. Florence had made herself look calm, almost formal. In her right hand she held a small bottle. It should have held her heart medicine, but it had become the means of her death. That was the fourth of August, 1913.

## Part 11 — Leonora Tells the Truth

The strange thing is that, when I remember the rest of that evening, one sentence stands out more clearly than anything else. Leonora said to me, "Of course you might marry her." I asked whom she meant. She answered, "The girl." I had never thought of marrying Nancy. I had never even thought that I cared for her in that way.

I must have been speaking like a man coming out of a deep sleep. Perhaps a person has two selves inside him. One self says things that the other self does not know or understand. I had thought nothing, or so I believed. Yet I had said, "Now I can marry the girl," only two hours after my wife's death.

That foolish sentence changed what happened later. If I had not said it, Leonora might never have told me the whole truth about Florence and Edward. She thought that I had known more than I knew. She thought that I had suffered in silence, as she had suffered. She thought that I had permitted things, as she had been forced to permit them. In that way, my empty words opened the door to her confidence.

A month ago, about a week after Edward's funeral, I was sitting with Leonora at Branshaw. We were talking about how long I should stay there. She spoke in her clear, thoughtful voice and said, "Stay here forever, if you can." Then she

added that I was like a brother to her, a friend, and the only comfort left to her in the world. She said this quietly, almost gently.

Then, in the same natural voice, she said the words that changed everything for me. “Is it not strange,” she said, “that if your wife had not been my husband’s mistress, you would probably never have been here at all?” That was how I received the news. It came straight at me, without warning. Leonora did not prepare me for it, because she believed I already knew.

I said nothing. I do not even remember feeling anything. Perhaps some deeper part of me felt pain, but the part of me that was awake felt only a kind of clear surprise. It was like hearing that some person one knows has been secretly close to another person. Suddenly many small, unexplained things began to fit together. But even then I did not truly think them through.

We were in Leonora’s small study. Outside the window, the lawn lay quiet in the grey light. The house stood in a little hollow, with pine woods at the edge. A strong wind moved above the trees, but from the room everything looked still. Two rabbits were feeding at the far side of the grass, as if death and sorrow meant nothing to them.

Leonora stood by the window and turned the little wooden end of the blind cord round and round in her fingers. She looked out at the lawn and said that Edward had been dead only ten days, and yet rabbits were already on the grass. Then she turned to me and spoke very plainly. “I think it was stupid of Florence to kill herself,” she said.

That was the first time I knew Florence had killed herself. You may think I was a fool not to have known it before. Perhaps I was. But you must understand the scene. There had been hurry, confusion, hotel people, police, and the careful silence of respectable people. No one had come to me and said, “Your wife has killed herself.”

I had seen Florence run in with her white face and her hand pressed to her heart. Soon after, I had found her lying on her bed with the small brown bottle in her hand. That bottle was supposed to hold her heart medicine. Naturally, I thought she had had one of her attacks. I thought she had run upstairs to take the medicine

and had died before it could save her.

For years I had believed that her heart might stop at any moment. Every part of my life had been arranged around that belief. So when I saw the bottle in her hand, my mind went straight to the old explanation. Her heart had failed. It seemed sad, terrible, and yet completely possible. It never entered my head that the bottle held poison.

I said slowly to Leonora, “Did Florence kill herself? I did not know.” I wanted her to understand that, if she meant to speak, she would have to tell me much more than she had expected. I was not hiding knowledge. I truly had none. I was standing outside the whole story, even though I had lived inside it for years.

Leonora looked at me then with a kind of surprise. I think she began, at that moment, to understand how little I had known. She had taken my calmness for knowledge. She had taken my silence for self-control. But my silence had been emptiness. My calmness had been ignorance.

Not even Edward had known the truth about Florence’s death. He was more intimate with her than I had ever been, and yet he too believed she had died from heart trouble. The only people who knew the truth were Leonora, the Grand Duke, the police chief, and the hotel owner. They kept the matter quiet. That was the way such things were handled in that world.

My memory of that night is made of broken pictures. I remember the pink light of the electric lamps in the hotel lounge. I remember cane tables, newspapers, plants, ashtrays, and polished little match holders. I remember the Grand Duke’s kind, heavy face. I remember the sharp face of the police chief and the smooth empty face of the hotel owner.

They moved in and out of my sight like heads floating in water. Their voices came and went. The Grand Duke spoke softly. The police chief answered quickly. The hotel owner talked in a low, careful voice. They seemed to speak over me or around me, not really to me.

Perhaps they let me stay because I was the husband. Perhaps I had a right to be there because the dead woman was mine. But I felt no such right. I felt no power at all. I sat there while they arranged things. Then they went away, and I

was left alone for a long time.

I thought nothing. I felt no clear grief, no anger, no wish to act. I did not want to run upstairs and throw myself beside Florence's body. I did not want to question anyone. I only saw the objects in the room, one after another, as if they were the whole world. A table, a chair, a plant, a light, an ashtray. That was all.

Then Leonora came to me. It must have been then that I made the strange remark about marrying the girl. I do not remember saying it, but Leonora remembered. She must have thought that I had been waiting for freedom, just as she herself had been trapped and suffering. In truth, I was not waiting for anything. I was hardly alive.

The next days are almost empty in my memory. They put me to bed, and I stayed there. They brought my clothes, and I dressed. They led me to an open grave, and I stood beside it. If they had led me into a river, I might have walked into the water. If they had put me before a train, I might have stood there until it struck me.

I was like a dead man who could still move. That is all I can say of those days. I had lost Florence, but I did not yet know who Florence had been. I had lost my marriage, but I had not yet understood that it had never been what I thought. The truth came later, in pieces, and Leonora was the person who gave me most of those pieces.

## Part 12 — Edward and Nancy in the Park

What had really happened that night was this. I learned it later, from Edward and from Leonora, and I put the pieces together as well as I could. Edward and Nancy had gone out to the concert at the Casino. Soon after they left, Leonora asked Florence to follow them and act as a proper older woman. Florence went after them into the dark.

Florence was dressed all in black because she was in mourning for a cousin. Nancy was dressed in a light cream dress. In the darkness under the trees, Nancy must have shone faintly, like a small pale light. Florence could follow that light

easily enough. A jealous woman does not need much help when she is following the person she fears.

Edward did not take Nancy straight along the open path to the Casino. Instead, he led her under the trees of the park. He told me this much later, during the last terrible time of his life. He said he had meant no harm when he did it. He had not thought of Nancy as a woman who could be loved in that way.

They sat down on a public bench not far from the Casino. Light came through the tree trunks from the building. Edward could see Nancy's face in that broken light. He remembered her high forehead, her troubled eyebrows, her direct eyes, and her strange serious mouth. He remembered everything because, for him, that moment became the beginning of the end.

Florence must have come quietly over the short grass behind them. The music from the Casino was playing, and that would have covered the sound of her steps. She could stand behind a tree and see them clearly enough as two dark shapes on the bench. She could not be seen herself, because her black dress disappeared into the night. She was hidden, listening, and afraid.

I can see the picture now, though I was not there. The tall trees rose into the black air. The lights from the Casino lay in thin lines between the trunks. Edward and Nancy sat apart on the bench, not touching. Behind them, Florence stood near the tree, listening to words that would break her last hope.

Edward said that, until that moment, he had loved Nancy as a daughter. I believe him. He had missed her when she went away to her convent school, and he had been glad when she returned. But he had thought of this as a pure family love. If he had known what was growing in him, he said, he would have run from it in horror.

He had gone into the park meaning to talk about ordinary things. He might have spoken about horses, tennis, the convent, or what color dress Nancy should wear at a party. These were the kinds of things he had always discussed with her. He did not think that the safe wall around her could break. He did not think of being alone with her as a danger.

Then, suddenly, something in him changed. The words began to come before

he fully understood them. He spoke to her about what she meant to his life. He told her that she made him feel cleaner, braver, and better. He spoke as if her goodness gave him the strength to live. Perhaps he did not say that he loved her in plain words, but the meaning was there.

Edward was careful, later, to tell me that he did not touch her. He said he had no physical thought at that moment. He sat at one end of the bench, and she sat at the other. He leaned a little toward her, and she looked toward the lights. Her face, he said, had a strange expression that he could not explain.

Nancy did not understand the danger either. She loved Edward with a young girl's worship. To her, he was brave, kind, noble, and almost perfect. She had heard of his good actions, his care for soldiers, and his kindness to poor people. She thought of him almost as a father, a hero, and a guide.

So when he praised her deeply, she was probably happy. She did not think he was trying to take her from Leonora. She believed Edward and Leonora's marriage was firm and sacred. He had always spoken of Leonora with respect. Nancy therefore thought that, when he said she was dear to him, Leonora was still above everyone else.

To Nancy, his words must have sounded like a great blessing. Her childhood had been full of fear, anger, and shame. Her father had been violent, and her mother had made home unhappy. Now the man she most honored seemed to say that she was good and precious. It was as if a judge had set her free from the pain of her early life.

Edward stopped himself when he understood what he was doing. That is important. He did not try to go further. He did not take her hand or draw her near. He checked his own words and turned them back into safer speech. Nancy, innocent as she was, remained glad and did not yet know what had happened.

But Florence knew enough. She heard the tone, even if she did not hear every word. She understood that Edward's feeling had turned away from her. She had held him for years through fear, pressure, and desire. Now she saw that a young girl, almost without trying, had taken the place she wanted for herself. That must have struck her like a blow.

I do not think Edward's love for Nancy was like his other loves. I do not defend him, but I must say what I believe. With the other women, his feeling had come, burned, and changed. With Nancy, it became the last fact of his life. He did not wear himself out trying to win her. He wore himself out trying to leave her untouched.

Perhaps that is what made it more terrible. If he had been only base, the story would be easier to judge. But he loved her and tried not to destroy her. He failed, of course, because even his silence and struggle became part of the disaster. Still, I cannot look back and call him simply wicked. I knew too much of his kindness to do that.

Florence ran back from the park before she saw Bagshawe. Her face was already white with pain when she entered the hotel. So Bagshawe was not the only cause of her death. He was the last blow, but not the first. Before she saw him beside me, she had already lost Edward.

If the matter had been only Nancy, Florence might have fought. She would have wept, threatened, pleaded, and acted some grand part. She might have told Edward that he had broken his promises. She might even have tried to tell me about her great passion, in order to make herself seem like a tragic woman. Florence was always acting before an imagined audience.

But Bagshawe brought back the old shame that she could not bear. She did not want me to know about Jimmy. She might have liked me to know that Edward had loved her, because that could make her seem important. But Jimmy was different. By then she saw him as low and ugly, and the thought that I might learn of him filled her with horror.

The date made it worse for her. It was the fourth of August, the day of her birth, the day she had gone around the world, the day of Jimmy, and the day she had married me. Now it was also the day she lost Edward and met Bagshawe again. To her mind, that date must have seemed like a sign. She ran upstairs and took the poison she had kept for years.

After that, Florence ended for me in a strange way. I did not mourn as a husband should. Perhaps I had been too tired for too long. Perhaps some hidden

part of me had already known that Florence was not real to me. She had been talk, dress, movement, and bright surface. When she died, it was like yesterday's newspaper being thrown away.

I know this sounds cold. I do not defend it. I only say what happened inside me. From that day, I thought more of Nancy than of Florence. I did not sigh and suffer like a young lover. I simply felt that, after some hard business was done, I might go toward Nancy as one goes toward a city long seen in dreams.

I was forty-five, and Nancy was not yet twenty-two. But I did not think the difference impossible. Men rarely think such things impossible when their own wish is involved. I believed I could be kind to her, protect her, and make her happy. I had been shut away from real life for twelve years, and I thought I must return to it before I could stand before her. So, two weeks after Florence's death, I went to the United States.

## Part 13 — Nancy Rufford

Immediately after Florence's death, Leonora began to watch Edward and Nancy more closely. She had guessed what had happened under the trees near the Casino. After I left Nauheim, they stayed there for several more weeks, and Leonora later told me that this was one of the hardest times of her life. She said it felt like a long, silent fight with weapons no one could see. The worst difficulty was that Nancy was completely innocent.

Nancy kept trying to go off alone with Edward, just as she had done all her life. When she was home from school, she had always walked, ridden, or talked with him freely. She wanted him to say kind things to her again. She did not know that this had now become dangerous. She still thought of him as her dear uncle, her hero, and almost her father.

The situation was almost impossible. Edward and Leonora hardly ever spoke to each other except in front of other people. When others were present, their manners were perfect. Nancy did not know anything about the hidden war between them. Also, both Edward and Leonora had long thought of Nancy as their

daughter, or perhaps more exactly as Leonora's daughter.

Nancy was not easy to describe. She was tall, very thin, and striking to look at. Her mouth often seemed full of pain, and her eyes sometimes looked as if she had suffered too much. Yet she also had a wonderful sense of fun. At one moment she could seem almost strange and awkward, and at the next moment she could be beautiful.

She had very heavy black hair, so heavy that I often wondered how she could carry it. She was just over twenty-one, but she did not always seem the same age. Sometimes she seemed as old as a woman who had seen all the sorrow in the world. Sometimes she seemed no more than sixteen. She could speak of saints one minute and roll on the grass with a large puppy the next.

She could ride hard after the hounds, as if fear meant nothing to her. She could also sit perfectly still for hours when Leonora had one of her headaches. She would soak handkerchiefs in vinegar and place them gently where Leonora needed them. She was wonderfully patient and wonderfully impatient. I suppose her convent training had helped to make her like that.

I remember one of her letters from school, when she was about sixteen. She wrote that her school was losing a hockey match at half-time. So the girls went into the chapel and prayed for victory. After that, they won the match. Then, at supper, the whole school became wild with joy until the Reverend Mother rang a little bell and everything stopped at once.

That was Nancy's world: freedom for a moment, then discipline in an instant. I do not much like that tradition, but I must say that it gave Nancy a very strong sense of right and wrong. Sometimes that sense showed in her eyes like the edge of a knife. It could almost frighten me. I felt that I was in the presence of a standard much finer than my own.

Once, when she was going back to the convent, I gave her two gold coins as a small gift. She thanked me very warmly and said the money would be useful. I asked why. She explained that the girls were not allowed to talk while walking through the garden from chapel to dining room. Nancy thought this rule was foolish, so she broke it every day on purpose.

Each evening the girls had to say whether they had done anything wrong. Each evening Nancy confessed that she had broken the rule. The punishment cost her sixpence every time. When I asked why she always confessed, she answered simply, “The girls of the Holy Child are known for telling the truth. It is a great bother, but I must do it.” That was Nancy exactly.

Her childhood had been miserable before the convent gave her order. Her father, Major Rufford, was a violent man with a terrible temper. Her first clear memory was of seeing him strike her mother at breakfast. Her mother fell from the table and lay still. The house was full of sharp words, fear, and sudden anger.

Mrs Rufford had been Leonora’s closest friend, but she seems to have been a hard woman. She had a cutting tongue, and even Nancy feared it. Major Rufford might come in already angry from working with his soldiers under a hot sun. Then Mrs Rufford would say something bitter, and the whole house would explode. Once, when Nancy tried to stand between them, her father struck her so hard on the forehead that she lay unconscious for three days.

Still, Nancy seemed to love her father more than her mother. She remembered some rough kindness from him. When she was very small, he had sometimes dressed her awkwardly but tenderly when no servant could be found. Servants did not stay long in that unhappy house. Mrs Rufford was often unable to manage things, and perhaps she drank.

One day Nancy came back from a ride at Fort William and was suddenly sent south with her governess. The governess had a white, frightened face. Nancy had expected to go to the convent two months later, but now she was sent at once. From that time her mother disappeared from her life. Two weeks later, Leonora came to the convent and told her that her mother was dead.

I never knew exactly what happened to Mrs Rufford until the very end of the story. Leonora did not speak of her. Major Rufford went to India and came back only rarely and for short visits. Little by little, Nancy made her real home at Branshaw Teleragh. There were dogs, horses, old servants, the Forest, and Edward and Leonora, who loved her.

I had known Nancy for many years. She came to Nauheim for the last part of

the Ashburnhams' stay almost every season. I watched her grow up. She was always cheerful with me and, until she was about eighteen, she kissed me good night and good morning. She would bring me small things, laugh at my stories about Philadelphia, and move about the room with quick young energy.

But under her brightness there was fear. I remember one morning when she was eighteen and her father was visiting Europe. We were sitting in the gardens near the iron-colored fountain. Leonora had one of her headaches, and we were waiting for Florence and Edward to return from their baths. Nancy looked wonderfully beautiful that morning, all in white, under a white parasol, with a little color in her cheeks.

We were talking about lotteries and whether buying tickets was right or wrong. Then, from behind us, her father's voice sounded through the air. It was a heavy, commanding voice, and he was speaking to another man. I heard him say something hard about humanity. When I looked back at Nancy, her face had become whiter than her dress.

Her eyes were closed, and her hand searched blindly until it found my arm. "Never speak of it," she said. "Promise me you will never tell my father." Then she opened her eyes and looked straight at me. She said that the dreams were terrible, and that she did not understand why the saints allowed such things. That voice of her father's had brought back the whole terror of her childhood.

Yet, when she was with her father, she behaved lovingly and bravely. She would hold his coat, question him, kiss his head, and try to make him comfortable. The poor man almost bent himself before her, and she did everything she could to make him feel safe. She was wonderfully well-bred in that way. Only the sudden sound of his harsh voice could break through her control.

After Florence's death, this same innocent girl kept wanting Edward's company. At Branshaw she had gone with him to see tenants, hunt rats, catch rabbits, fish, ride, and visit the poor. At Nauheim she had often gone with him to the Casino in the evening. No one had thought it strange before, not even Florence. Leonora herself had usually gone to bed at ten.

Now Leonora had to stop all this without making Nancy understand why.

Somehow she managed it. She never let Edward and Nancy be alone except in bright daylight and crowded places. Perhaps her Catholic training helped her to arrange things quietly. Florence's death also helped, because mourning gave her excuses. Edward's own illness of spirit helped too, because he looked worse every day.

Edward's shoulders bent, shadows grew under his eyes, and he often seemed absent from the room. At first Leonora wondered whether he was grieving for Florence. But she watched him closely and spoke of Florence at unexpected times. He did not start or show pain. He believed Florence had died from her heart, and he felt no deep guilt about her death.

What was breaking him was Nancy. Leonora made Nancy go to bed at ten, though Nancy could not understand why. She said they must be quiet because of Florence's death, and perhaps she added prayers for Florence's soul. Then, one evening, when Nancy again asked to walk with Edward after dinner, Edward himself helped Leonora. He said that Doctor von Hauptmann had ordered him to go to bed after dinner because his heart was worse.

He looked directly at Leonora when he said this. She understood both the words and the look. The words gave her the excuse she needed. The look told her that Edward knew what she feared and that he blamed her for thinking he would harm Nancy. He went upstairs and waited until the girl was safely in bed. Later Leonora heard him go out alone and come back much later with heavy steps.

On the last night at Nauheim, Leonora tested him. She asked him to take Nancy to the Casino, saying that the poor child's visit had been spoiled. Edward looked at her for a long moment and then agreed. Nancy jumped up and kissed him. Leonora later said that those two words, "Why, yes," gave her more relief than almost any words in her life.

That night Nancy and Edward returned happily, joking like old friends. Nancy opened Leonora's door and said they had had a glorious time. She said Edward was much better and had even raced her for a little way. Later, Leonora softly opened the door between her room and Edward's for the first time. She found him kneeling beside his bed, holding a small bright image of the Blessed Virgin that

Nancy had once given him. His shoulders shook with heavy sobs. He was not a Catholic, but that was how his suffering came out.

## Part 14 — How Edward Married Leonora

After they returned to Branshaw Teleragh, Leonora broke down completely. This happened just when she had reason to feel relief. She believed that she could trust Edward with Nancy, and she believed Nancy could be trusted absolutely. For many weeks she had watched every movement and every word. When that hard watchfulness suddenly relaxed, her whole mind seemed to give way.

That is one of the most painful parts of the story. It is terrible to see a clear and strong mind begin to shake. Leonora had always seemed firm, cold, and able to bear anything. But no great sorrow comes alone. Even when one trouble seems to pass, it leaves other troubles behind it, like dark followers on the road.

You must understand one thing clearly. Leonora loved Edward with a love that was almost the same as hatred. She loved him deeply, and she suffered from loving him. For years she had lived beside him without giving him one tender word. I do not know how anyone could do such a thing, but Leonora did it.

At the beginning, she had been almost a child. She was one of seven daughters in a poor Irish country house. She had just come back from the convent where she had been educated. She was only nineteen. She had hardly spoken to any man except a priest.

The house to which she returned was almost as closed as a convent. There were seven girls, a tired mother, and a worried father. The family had a name, but not much money. Outside, the tenants were angry, and sometimes her father was even shot at from behind hedges. Inside, the girls lived in a narrow, protected world.

The seven sisters walked in the old garden, played games near the high wall, painted pictures, sewed, and copied poems into albums. Once a week they went to Mass. Once a week they went to confession with an old nurse. They did not think their lives were poor or strange, because they had known nothing else. They

were happy in the only way they understood.

One day a photographer came from the county town to take their picture. To the girls this seemed a great event and almost a wild expense. They stood together in white dresses under an old apple tree. But it was not really a useless expense. The photograph was meant to help arrange a marriage.

Three weeks before that, Colonel Powys, Leonora's father, had written to Colonel Ashburnham, Edward's father. The two men were old friends. Colonel Powys asked whether Edward could marry one of his daughters. He said it would save him, because if one daughter married well, perhaps the others would follow.

The idea was not completely new. Years before, the two families had spoken of such a marriage. Mrs Ashburnham had been a Powys before her marriage, and she was still a close friend of Mrs Powys. The families did not meet often, because soldiers and their wives move about the world. But the mothers wrote to each other for many years about small family matters, children, servants, clothes, and repairs.

Edward was twenty-two at that time. He was, I believe, almost as innocent in mind as Leonora herself. His mother had watched over him carefully. His school had been respectable, and he had always disliked dirty talk. At Sandhurst he kept away from men who liked that kind of thing. He cared about soldiering, mathematics, land, politics, and, oddly enough, old books.

Mrs Ashburnham was proud of him. She wrote often to Mrs Powys about how pure and fine her son was. Then one day, while walking in Bond Street with Edward, she saw him turn his head to look again at a well-dressed young woman. It was probably nothing. He may not even have known that he had done it. But his mother was alarmed and wrote about it.

That letter helped bring the two families together. Colonel Ashburnham answered Colonel Powys in a half-joking way. He said that, before Edward chose one of the girls, they should at least know what the girls looked like. That was why the photograph was taken. I have seen it: seven girls in white, all rather alike, except Leonora, whose face was crossed by the shadow of an apple branch.

After this came a difficult time for the Powys family. Mrs Ashburnham was

willing to consider the marriage, but only if Edward truly liked one of the girls. She said there must be a love match. That sounded noble, but it made everything harder for the poor Irish family. They could not easily afford to send one daughter to England, and they could not easily afford to receive the Ashburnhams in Ireland.

Still, they took the risk. Edward, his father, and his mother came to the lonely manor house. The Powys family gave them rough shooting, rough fishing, and the company of seven young women. I think the girls made more of an impression on Mrs Ashburnham than on Edward. To him, they were so clean and simple that he almost saw them as boys rather than women.

Then Edward's mother had a private talk with him. I do not know exactly what she said. English mothers and English sons have conversations that are not easy for an outsider to imagine. But the next morning Colonel Ashburnham asked for Leonora's hand on behalf of Edward. This caused trouble, because Leonora was the third daughter, not the eldest.

Mrs Powys almost wished to refuse. In her mind, the eldest daughter had the first right. But Colonel Powys pointed out that the visit had already cost them a great deal of money. There had been extra food, extra sheets, an extra servant, and many other expenses. They could not afford to lose the chance. So Edward and Leonora became engaged.

I do not know whether Edward truly loved her then. He admired her, certainly. He thought she was the best of the sisters, and he said he would have no other. Before the marriage, he probably made pretty speeches taken from the books he had read. But later, when he tried to remember his feelings, everything seemed far away and misty to him.

He admired Leonora very deeply. He admired her truthfulness, her clean mind, her strong body, her fair skin, her golden hair, her religion, and her sense of duty. He was proud to take her about with him. She looked exactly right beside him. In society, she helped make him seem complete.

But she had no magic power over him. That was the sad truth. Edward was most drawn to women who seemed sorrowful, weak, or in need of comfort. Leonora was not like that. She was too clear, too firm, and too obedient at the

beginning. She had been taught that a wife's first duty was to obey, and so she obeyed.

For Leonora, however, admiration soon became deep love. When Edward came toward her across a room, she changed. Her eyes followed him with trust, pride, thanks, and love. He was her husband, but also almost her guide into a new world. She had come straight from the convent and the closed Irish house, and now she entered the life of an English officer's wife.

For five or six years, she was wonderfully happy. There were dinners, visits, dances, talk, and polite admiration. Good women treated her kindly, almost as if she were a charming child. Good men admired her in the proper way. Her priest approved of her life, and Edward allowed her to give little treats to the girls at her old convent. Even the Reverend Mother approved of Edward.

I do not know exactly what an officer's wife's life was like, but for Leonora it seemed almost heaven. She had order, movement, respect, love, and duty all together. She believed she had been placed where God wanted her to be. Edward was handsome, honorable, and kind in public life. She was proud of him and happy to belong to him.

Then, after those first years, clouds began to gather. Leonora was about twenty-three. Her strong and practical mind had grown more confident. She began to see that Edward was far too generous with money. At first this may have seemed noble. Then it began to look dangerous.

Edward gave too much money to army matters, to servants, to tenants, and to people who asked him for help. His parents had died, and Branshaw had become his responsibility. Though he remained in the army, he paid close attention to the estate through his land steward. Aldershot was not very far away, and he and Leonora spent much of his leave at Branshaw. There, little by little, Leonora began to see that the house, the land, and their future were not as safe as they looked.

## Part 15 — Money, Religion, and the Kilsyte Case

Leonora soon saw that Edward's kindness could destroy them. He was not

careless in an ordinary selfish way. He was careless because he wanted to do good, and because he wanted everyone near him to be saved, helped, fed, forgiven, or set up in life. He reduced rents for tenants and let them believe the lower rent would last forever. He helped drunkards who came before him as a local judge. He found work for fallen women and tried to give children a better start.

These actions may sound admirable, and in many ways they were. But a country house cannot be run on endless soft feelings. Branshaw needed money, repairs, servants, horses, and careful accounts. Edward gave money as if money had no bottom. He paid for prizes, charities, local groups, hospitals, and every weak person who touched his heart.

Leonora had to stop many of these things. She put rents back where they had been. She ended many payments to societies. She removed some of the people Edward had taken into houses or work simply because he felt pity for them. She did not do this because she was cruel. She did it because Branshaw would otherwise have gone to pieces.

With children, however, she was softer. Edward had helped many children, and Leonora did not throw them out into the world. She supported most of them until they could begin work. I think this came partly from the fact that she had no children of her own. That was a deep sorrow to her, and she carried it silently.

Leonora believed that the childlessness was somehow her fault. She had married Edward without making one important religious condition. If they had children, they would not necessarily be brought up as Catholics. To Leonora, that was not a small point. It was a wound in the soul. She felt that she had failed before any child had even been born.

Her religion was a hard law inside her. I do not pretend that I understand it, and I must confess that part of me has always disliked it. I was brought up in a quiet Philadelphia Quaker world, and old fears about Rome still lived somewhere in me. Yet, when I speak of Leonora's religion, I am not only speaking against it. I am trying to explain the force that held her in her place.

She believed that marriage could not simply be broken because a husband was weak. She believed that divorce was wrong. She believed that she had been given

the task of making Edward a faithful husband, or at least of saving what could be saved. I think now that this task was impossible. But she believed it was her duty, and Leonora was not a woman who ran away from duty.

Perhaps another woman, in another country, would have acted differently. She might have found a way to end the marriage quietly. She might have allowed Edward to fall into a lower life, where his mistakes would harm fewer people. He might have become a wandering gentleman with sad love affairs and little money. That might even have been kinder to him.

But Leonora could not think like that. Her mind was formal, proud, and strict. She was patient in a terrible way. She could suffer and keep silent for years. She could give up clothes, jewels, pleasure, friendship, and comfort if doing so would save the estate and the name. What she could not easily give up was the idea that she must save Edward.

This made her hard, and sometimes it made her wrong. I do not say this with pleasure. She was often noble, but noble people can still do harm. She watched Edward too closely and spoke too little. She believed silence was dignity, but silence also allowed poison to grow in the house.

Edward, for his part, was full of remorse. That is one of the keys to him. He did wrong and then suffered terribly because he had done it. But the suffering did not always stop him from doing the next wrong thing. It only made him more tender, more ashamed, and more in need of some woman who would comfort him.

I do not want to make him seem like a common bad man. He was not. He was a sentimentalist. The servant girl in the Kilsyte case was pretty and sad-looking. I believe that when Edward kissed her, he wanted first of all to comfort her. That may sound foolish, but with Edward such foolishness was possible.

If the girl had loved him, I think he might have set her up in a small house and been faithful to her for years. He could do such things. His wrong actions were often mixed with ideas of duty, care, and protection. That is why he was dangerous. He could make even his weakness look, to himself, like kindness.

The Kilsyte case caused him great public trouble. The girl was a servant in the house of an important local Nonconformist gentleman. That man was politically

opposed to Edward and wanted to ruin him. Questions were asked in Parliament. People spoke of removing Edward from his position as a magistrate. They even suggested that he was not fit to remain an officer.

Edward suffered badly under this attack. He feared public scenes more than almost anything. He hated noise, scandal, open anger, and the sight of people pointing at him. The whole affair burned him deeply. After that, he was cured of making advances to women of the servant class. That seemed, at least, like a blessing to Leonora.

Leonora was almost relieved that his later troubles involved women nearer to their own world. That sounds cold, but I understand it. A scandal with a maid seemed lower to her, more dirty and more public. A foolish attachment to a woman like Maisie Maidan seemed easier to cover with silence. Society could pretend not to see such things if the people involved had the right manners.

Still, Edward's affairs did cost money. Two of them cost a great deal. One involved a woman connected with a Grand Duke. Another involved the wife of a brother officer, and her husband later demanded money from Edward. Leonora knew about that passion too. It had been real enough in its way, and it had lasted for years.

Edward's feelings seemed to move upward through society. First came the servant girl. Then came the expensive woman. Then came the unhappy wife of another officer. After her came Maisie Maidan. After Maisie came Florence. And after Florence came the one real and final passion of Edward's life. But I must not move too quickly toward that end.

Through all this, Leonora repaired what she could. In India, where life was cheaper, she saved money with bitter care. She cut expenses, watched accounts, and starved her own wishes. She spent little on herself. She did not buy the dresses, jewels, and pretty things that a woman in her position might have enjoyed. She was building back Edward's fortune while Edward kept giving pieces of it away.

This made their marriage stranger and colder. Edward needed Leonora's moral support, but he did not give her his heart. Leonora loved him deeply, but she gave him little tenderness. They lived side by side like two people joined by law, money,

religion, and public duty, but divided in almost every private feeling. Each needed the other, and each wounded the other by that need.

When the Maisie Maidan matter began in India, Leonora had almost made peace with her hard life. She had got the money nearly straight. She had accepted that Edward was weak. She had accepted that she must watch him, guide him, and save Branshaw. She may even have believed that, if she brought Maisie safely to Nauheim and then returned to England, life might become manageable again.

So, in a dim and tired way, Leonora arrived at Nauheim almost contented. That is a strange phrase, but it is the best one I have. She was not happy. She had long ago passed beyond happiness. But she thought she had brought order out of ruin, and she believed she could still hold the pieces together. She did not yet know that Florence was waiting to break even that poor order apart.

## Part 16 — La Dolciquita and Ruin

It is very hard to give a complete picture of a man. I do not know whether I have made Edward clear to you. Perhaps I have spoken too much of his passions and not enough of his ordinary life. Most of his days were not wild or strange. Most of his days were regular, useful, and almost dull.

Edward rose early, took a cold bath, breakfasted, and then worked with his regiment. In the afternoon he played polo or cricket, or dealt with letters about his estate. In the evening he dined, played cards, played billiards with Leonora, or went to some social event. His love affairs took only small parts of his time, at least until the last months. That is why the whole matter is so difficult to judge.

If you had watched him from the outside, you would have seen a hard-working and proper English gentleman. He had good habits, good manners, good health, and a strong sense of public duty. Those things were real. They were not false decoration. They will probably be written on his stone by Leonora, and they will not be lies.

Yet there was also another Edward. This other Edward needed women to believe in him. He needed some woman to listen, admire, forgive, and tell him

that his ideas were noble. Men were not useful to him in that way. With men he talked of horses, sport, and army matters. With women he could talk of honor, duty, old families, land, and the sorrow of not being understood.

I have often wondered whether we should trust first impressions. My first impressions of waiters and servants were usually right. If a man seemed careful and polite at first, he usually remained careful and polite. But people can surprise you. A maid in our Paris flat seemed perfectly honest, and yet she stole one of Florence's rings in order to help her young man.

In America, after Florence's death, I had to deal with a little business in Philadelphia. I found myself judging people by their faces and first words. The city seemed full of people warning me against other people. Everyone appeared to believe that secret forces were working against him. It was a strange change after the quiet hotel life I had lived with Florence.

I met one young relative there, a man called Carter. He was handsome, gentle, honest-looking, and engaged to a nice girl called Mary. Because I still believed in careful judgment, I made inquiries about his character. His employers said he was honest and good. My relatives had some dark complaint against him, but in the end it was only that he was a Democrat while they were Republicans.

I mention this because character is a very uncertain thing. Who can truly give anyone a character? Who knows another heart? Who even knows his own heart? You may know how a person usually behaves, but you cannot know how that person will behave in every possible case. Until you know that, your judgment is never complete.

So it was with Edward. The Kilsyte case had, for a short time, brought him and Leonora a little nearer. Leonora had stood by him. She had accepted his claim that he only meant to comfort a crying girl. The world around him accepted this too, more or less. The law treated him lightly, though the public talk hurt him badly.

Edward later told me that the case itself harmed him. Before that time, he said, he had not truly imagined himself as an unfaithful husband. But while he was being questioned in court, the dirty suggestions of the lawyers put new thoughts into his head. He remembered the feel of the girl in his arms. From that moment,

he said, the memory became a temptation.

I do not fully believe him. He was twenty-seven, unhappy with Leonora, and already hungry for sympathy. Some kind of crash was probably coming. Still, Edward believed that the law had planted ideas in him. He saw himself as a man damaged by public shame and by the ugly minds of others.

After that, he began looking for a woman who could give him moral support. At first, he did not think of making anyone his mistress. I believe this is true, strange as it sounds. He wanted a woman who would listen to him and agree that his duties as a landowner and gentleman were noble. Several ladies would have done this gladly, but married women had husbands, and unmarried girls could not safely spend too much time with him.

One of Leonora's priests then gave her some advice. He thought Edward was too serious and stiff. He believed Edward and Leonora might grow closer if Edward learned to enjoy life a little. So he suggested that Leonora take Edward to Monte Carlo. The idea was not foolish in itself. But with Edward, it turned out terribly.

At Monte Carlo, Edward met the woman people called La Dolciquita. She was the Grand Duke's mistress, a Spanish dancer with a passionate appearance. She noticed Edward at a dance in their hotel. He was tall, fair, handsome, and seemed very rich. Leonora went to bed early, pleased that Edward appeared to be enjoying himself.

That night La Dolciquita wanted Edward for his good looks. Edward took her into the dark garden and kissed her with a sudden force that shocked even himself. He had held himself in for many years, and his passion broke out all at once. Later that night he went to her room. When she fell asleep beside him, he believed he had fallen deeply and forever in love.

La Dolciquita did not see it that way at all. She was cool, practical, and businesslike. To her, Edward had been pleasant for one night. If he wanted more, he must pay. She had a comfortable life with the Grand Duke, and she would risk it only for enough money. She spoke of the matter as if she were discussing rent or insurance.

Edward was shocked to the soul. He believed in tenderness, women's goodness, and love as a serious bond. Because she had given herself to him, he believed he now had a duty to support, cherish, and love her for life. She only shrugged. She had a mother, sisters, and her own future to provide for. She did not mean to be cruel, but she saw no reason to be kind without payment.

Edward tried to argue with her. He wanted to tell her that real love, duty, and loyalty were higher than money. He wanted to save her from her cold view of life. But her door closed to him. She disappeared from the hotel rooms where he might meet her. To break through that silence, he needed a large sum of money.

Then Edward lost control. For about two weeks he drank heavily and gambled wildly. His eyes sank, his body shook, and he could not bear Leonora's touch. He thought all this was love for La Dolciquita. Perhaps much of it was really shame because he had been unfaithful to Leonora. But Edward did not understand himself well enough to know the difference.

One night, after he had lost an enormous amount of money, La Dolciquita came calmly into his bedroom. He was almost too drunk to know her. She sat in a chair, knitting and holding smelling salts near her nose. When he could understand her, she told him not to go back to the gaming tables. She said he should sleep first and come to see her later.

By that time, Leonora had heard about the losses. A sensible woman called Mrs Colonel Whelan told her that there must be a woman behind Edward's mad behavior. She advised Leonora to leave at once for London and speak to her lawyer and her priest. It was no use arguing with Edward while he was in that state. Leonora followed the advice and left.

Edward did not know she had gone. When he woke, he went straight to La Dolciquita. She gave him lunch in her rooms, and he wept on her neck. She bore this kindly for a time. Then she asked how much money he had left. She said that, if the gaming tables were going to get the rest, she might as well have it herself.

They settled on a sum, and she agreed to go with him to Antibes for a week. Edward left a note for Leonora saying that he had gone yachting with friends. Then he went away with La Dolciquita. But the week brought him little pleasure.

She talked almost only of money and asked constantly for expensive gifts.

At the end of the week, she dismissed him quietly. Edward stayed around Antibes for three more days, trying to feel like a great wounded lover. Then his appetite returned, and with it came the thought of Leonora. He returned to Monte Carlo and found a telegram from her in London. It asked him to come back as soon as convenient.

Only then did he learn that Leonora had left before he wrote his false note. He understood that she knew more than he had thought. The journey back to London was very hard for him. He was frightened, ashamed, and lonely. For the first time in a long while, Leonora seemed to him wonderfully desirable.

## Part 17 — Mrs Basil and Leonora's Plan

I call this the saddest story, not the Ashburnham tragedy, because tragedy seems too grand a word for it. There was no strong river carrying everyone toward one clear end. There was no noble fall, no great punishment sent down from heaven, and no simple villain standing in the middle of the scene. There were two people, Edward and Leonora, with noble sides to their natures. Yet they drifted through life and caused misery, fear, pain, and death.

Major Basil was not exactly a villain either. He was the husband of the woman who next comforted Edward. He was weak, careless, and rather useless, but he did not begin as an evil person. While they were all in the same station in Burma, he borrowed money from Edward. He did not even seem to have any strong reason for needing it, except that weak people often need money.

Edward had some money of his own for small pleasures and army needs. Leonora allowed him that much because she was just. The estate truly belonged to Edward, even if she was managing it. She knew that a man in his position needed money for his regiment, his clothes, his horses, and his small public duties. But every pound that went out troubled her, because she was trying to rebuild what Edward had destroyed.

The figures were something like this. Branshaw should have brought in about

five thousand pounds a year if it had been carefully managed. Because of Edward's early kindness and waste, it had brought in less. After the affair with La Dolciquita, it was worth still less. Leonora wanted to bring it back to its old strength. She was only twenty-four, but she set herself to this work with terrible energy.

When Edward came back from Monte Carlo, frightened and ashamed, Leonora met him in a London hotel. He tried to begin with weak words and perhaps some sign of affection. She cut him short. "We are near ruin," she said. "Will you let me put things right? If you will not, I shall leave you and go to Hendon." Hendon meant a Catholic place where she sometimes went for retreat.

Edward knew nothing. He did not know how much money he had lost. He did not know whether Leonora knew about La Dolciquita. He did not know whether she believed his story about going away with friends. He only wanted to hide somewhere and stop speaking. Leonora did not ask him many questions. That may have been one of the hardest punishments of all.

Within two days, Leonora and her lawyer had taken control of the property. I cannot explain the English legal details, but the result was clear. Edward no longer controlled Branshaw. Leonora controlled the money, the estate, and the plan for saving them. Edward went out of that part of his life like a man who has been turned out of his own house while still living under its name.

Leonora then acted quickly. She arranged for Edward to be moved to Burma with his regiment. She spent days with his land agent and told him that the estate must produce every possible penny. She let Branshaw furnished for seven years. She sold two old family pictures and some silver. She also raised a mortgage and used the money to pay the debts from Monte Carlo.

Edward cried for two days over the lost pictures and silver. To him, those things were not merely costly objects. They were his ancestors, his family story, and the visible sign of Branshaw. Leonora did not understand this at first. She thought of them as decorations that could be sold to save the real property. But to Edward, letting Branshaw to strangers felt almost like a physical shame.

In India, Leonora made them live as cheaply as possible. They had to live on

Edward's army pay and a small allowance. She gave him money for the things she thought a gentleman needed, but she controlled the rest with an iron hand. She spent little on herself. She went into religious retreat when she could, partly because it helped her soul and partly because it cost little.

Yet she bought expensive things for Edward. The fine leather cases I once thought were his own taste were really Leonora's gifts. Edward liked to be clean, but he did not mind looking rather worn. Leonora never understood that. She thought the cases, the clothes, and the good horse at Simla were proper rewards for him. She dressed him well while she herself lived with almost no softness.

At Simla and later in Burma, Edward spent much time with Mrs Basil. She was kind, gentle, and deeply sorry for him. I believe she became his mistress, though Edward, of course, never said this to me plainly. Their relation was romantic, full of long talks, sorrow, sympathy, and guilty returns to affection. Mrs Basil seems to have loved him truly and to have given him the comfort he wanted.

The beginning came through one of Leonora's economies. Edward had been reading the estate accounts in his dressing room. He discovered that an old farmer named Mumford had been removed from his farm and given a small cottage and a little money each week. Leonora thought she had been generous. Edward thought the old man had been wronged.

Mrs Basil found him in a Burmese garden at dusk. He was still in military clothes and had his sword with him. In his anger, he was cutting down plants and flowers as if they were enemies. The air was full of heavy scent, and the broken stems lay around his feet. Mrs Basil saw him in that wild state and asked what had happened.

Edward told her about old Mumford, and she listened with pity. She was already in love with him, and he had already been hungry for her sympathy. From that evening they began to speak deeply and often. For a while, I think, they behaved with outward care. Mrs Basil studied the Branshaw accounts with him until she knew the names of his fields almost by heart.

This might have lasted for years if Major Basil had not been moved to another station. Mrs Basil had to leave with her husband. Just before the move, Major

Basil discovered letters or some proof of the relation. I do not know whether he had known for a long time or whether he found out by chance. In any case, it cost Edward three hundred pounds at once.

After that, money demands came from Major Basil from time to time. He would write that he was badly in need of money, and Edward would send it. Perhaps it was blackmail. Perhaps it was partly covered by the language of loans between gentlemen. These things are never said plainly, but the meaning is clear enough. Edward paid because he had to pay, and because shame frightened him.

Edward was badly hurt when Mrs Basil went away. He had been truly fond of her, and he remained faithful to her memory for a long time. Mrs Basil also kept a tender feeling for him. Only a few days ago, Leonora received a proper and sad letter from her. She had read of Edward's death in an Indian paper and asked for details.

After this, the Ashburnhams were moved farther north, toward a place whose geography I do not know well. By then they had settled into the appearance of a model couple. In private they hardly spoke. Leonora stopped showing Edward the estate accounts. He thought this was because she no longer wanted him to know how much money she had saved. In truth, she had at last understood that it hurt him to see his own land managed by another hand.

So she tried, in that small way, to be kind. She could be kind, even when she seemed hard. She had saved Branshaw, but she had not saved the marriage. Edward respected her more and loved her less. Leonora controlled him more and reached him less. Then, in that tired and silent life, poor little Maisie Maidan appeared.

## Part 18 — Florence's Damage

I know that I have told this story in a wandering way. Perhaps it is hard to follow, like a path through a maze. I cannot help that. I am trying to speak as a man might speak beside a fire, with the wind outside and the sea sounding far away. In such a telling, one goes back and forward. One remembers late what

should perhaps have been said earlier.

Still, I think I have now explained the road that led to Maisie Maidan's death. I have tried to show Leonora's side, Edward's side, and, as far as I could, my own blind side. So let me return again to the day in the old castle, when Florence spoke about the Protest and laid her hand on Edward's wrist. That moment broke something in Leonora. It was the beginning of a deeper fall.

The longer I think about Florence, the harder I find it to be fair to her. She damaged Edward, and she damaged Leonora even more. Leonora's best qualities were pride and silence. Florence helped destroy both. When Leonora cried out in that dark room and on the terrace, she was trying to warn me, but she was also losing her own strongest protection.

I do not say that Leonora was wrong to fear what she saw. She had seen Florence looking at Edward. She had seen Edward answer with the look she knew too well. Perhaps Leonora should have acted differently. Perhaps she should have watched them more closely, kept Florence away from Edward, and taken Edward away as soon as Maisie died. It is ugly work, but sometimes that is how such work is done.

Yet who am I to condemn her? Poor Leonora had already carried too much. Her main hope in life had been to get Edward back. To her, this was not only a private wish. It was also a victory for marriage, for good order, and for her Church. That may sound strange, but it was how she saw the world.

Leonora believed that marriage was often a battle. Men, she thought, were weak and wandered. Wives had to wait, endure, and draw them back in the end. When she first learned of Edward's unfaithfulness, she went to the Mother Superior of her old convent. The old nun shook her head sadly and told her that men were like that, and that, with God's help, it would come right in the end.

That became Leonora's program for life. She must be patient, patient, and patient again. She must avoid public shame. She must not make scandal before the world. If, at last, she won Edward back, she would prove that one Catholic wife had kept her husband from complete ruin. She clung to this idea with a passion that was almost pain.

For a while, just before the disaster with Florence, Leonora thought her plan was beginning to work. Edward seemed to be cooling toward Maisie. He went to polo matches, played cards, and appeared cheerful. He was kind to Maisie, but no longer seemed hungry to spend every hour beside her. Leonora began to believe that Maisie had never truly been his mistress.

Edward also began to make small movements toward Leonora. Once or twice, when they were alone, he told her she looked nice. He noticed a dress she had bought in Frankfurt with Florence's help. He even came into her room one day to borrow a safety pin and gently patted her shoulder. These little things may seem almost nothing. To Leonora, they were precious.

He also thanked her for saving their money. He said she had been right to take care of the estate. He said that, because of her, he now had a little money to give away when he wished. Leonora later told me that this was one of the happiest moments of her life. For a moment, she believed Edward saw her, trusted her, and was coming back.

Then Florence laid her hand on his wrist in the castle. Leonora saw Edward's eyes. She knew that look from other women and other disasters. Everything she had hoped for fell at once. Maisie, at least, had seemed gentle and innocent. Florence was different. Leonora hated her from the beginning, and now she saw her as vulgar, hungry, and dangerous.

What made it worse was that Florence talked. She could not keep silent. She had to confess to someone, and she chose Leonora rather than me. If she had confessed to me, she might have had to explain far more: her heart, Jimmy, the locked room, and the whole false life. So she went to Leonora and hinted until Leonora, in anger, said the plain words for her.

"You want to tell me that you are Edward's mistress," Leonora said. "You may be. I have no use for him." That was a terrible sentence, because after it there was no return to the old silence. Florence kept coming to Leonora with messages from Edward. Edward, in his foolish and painful way, wanted some kind of peace with both women. He even wanted Leonora's forgiveness and tenderness while Florence still held him.

Florence told Leonora that Edward was sorry and longed to make things better. She insisted that her relation with him was pure because of her heart. Leonora answered with short, hard sentences. Once she told Florence that she would feel stained if Edward touched her after touching Florence. Such words hurt Florence, but they never stopped her for long. After a few days, she would come back and begin again.

Leonora herself grew worse in those years. She had once promised Edward that he might control his own income again. She had meant to keep that promise. But after Florence, she could no longer trust him at all. When they returned to Branshaw, she began to watch almost every cheque he wrote.

She allowed him a private account for the expenses connected with Florence and with his trips to Paris. But she troubled him about wine, fruit trees, harness, gates, blacksmith bills, and every small plan he made for the estate or the army. Edward once invented a very good new stirrup for soldiers and gave the design freely to the War Office. Leonora was angry because he had spent money and taken no profit. She could no longer see his public kindness without thinking of waste.

The saddest example came near the end of his life, though I mention it here because it shows how far things had gone. Edward spent much time and money defending a poor girl, the daughter of one of his gardeners, who was accused of killing her baby. He worked for her calmly and carefully, even while Nancy was on her way to India and his own heart was breaking. He helped to win her freedom. It was one of the last good acts of his life.

Leonora made a terrible scene about the cost. She thought that Edward should finally have learned economy. She even threatened to take his bank account away from him again. I think that helped finish him. If Nancy was lost, and if even public service was to be taken from him, what was left? Only empty days under Leonora’s control.

During those same years, Leonora tried once to have a love affair of her own. The man was called Bayham, and he seems to have been decent and kind. But it came to nothing. Leonora was too tired, too hurt, and too damaged by the long

acting of her life. Even when she tried to take one moment for herself, she could not enjoy it. She cried instead, because Florence and Edward had helped spoil even her chance of escape.

## Part 19 — Back to Branshaw

That brings me back to the time when I received Edward's short cable in Waterbury. He asked me to come to Branshaw and have a talk with him. I was busy then and almost sent an answer saying that I would start in two weeks. I had many matters to settle because of Uncle John Hurlbird's will. But before I could answer Edward, I had to speak with lawyers and then with the Misses Hurlbird.

I had expected the Misses Hurlbird to be very old. In my mind, so much time had passed that I felt I had been away from America for thirty years. In fact, it had been only twelve years. Miss Hurlbird was sixty-one, and Miss Florence Hurlbird was fifty-nine. They were both strong in body and mind, much stronger than was useful to me.

I wanted to leave America quickly, but the Hurlbird family made that difficult. They were very close as a family, except in one strange matter. Each person had a separate doctor, and each person trusted only that doctor. Each also had a separate lawyer. Naturally, every doctor and every lawyer warned me against the others. The whole matter became painfully complicated.

There was no ugly fight for money. The problem was moral and practical. Uncle John had left all his property to Florence, asking only that she build a memorial in Waterbury. The memorial was to help people who suffered from weak hearts. But Florence died five days after him, so her money and his money came to me.

I was quite ready to spend a great sum on people with heart disease. Uncle John had left about a million and a half dollars. Florence herself had been worth a great deal too, and I had money of my own. There was more than enough for the kind of memorial he wanted. I did not need the money for myself very much.

But then a strange difficulty appeared. The doctors had found that Uncle John

had not had heart disease after all. His heart had been sound. His trouble had really been in his lungs, and he had died of bronchitis. Miss Florence Hurlbird therefore said that the money should help people with lung disease instead of heart disease. That sounded reasonable enough.

The older Miss Hurlbird took a different view. She said that I should keep the money myself. She did not want any public memorial to the Hurlbird name. At the time, I thought this came from a quiet New England dislike of public show. Later I began to think there was another reason. Florence had left a letter to that aunt on her dressing table before she died.

Leonora had posted that letter without telling me. I do not know how Florence found time to write it. But I can believe that she did not wish to leave the world without saying something sharp and final. Perhaps she told her aunt about Edward. Perhaps she told enough to make the old lady feel that the Hurlbird name had better not be set in stone for everyone to see.

All this led to endless discussions. The doctors warned me that too much talk would be bad for the old ladies. At the same time, they warned me against one another. The lawyers had different plans for investing the money, protecting it, and making sure it would be used properly. I was tired beyond words. I had crossed the sea after Florence's death, and now I was trapped in rooms full of advice.

My own plan was simple. I thought the money could be divided between heart patients and lung patients. Uncle John had believed his heart was weak, even if it was not. Florence, as I then believed, had truly died of her heart. So both kinds of illness seemed to have a claim. I raised my offer to a million and a half dollars, half for each purpose.

This may sound a little funny, especially to a European listener. But in America such matters are very serious among people with money. We do not have noble titles to think about, and many decent people do not care for politics. So gifts to hospitals and public institutions become great moral questions. The Misses Hurlbird cried over the matter before I left.

Four hours after Edward's cable, Leonora's cable arrived. She wrote, "Yes,

please come. You could be so helpful." That decided me. I told my lawyer to manage the money as he thought best and to let the Misses Hurlbird decide the purpose. I was worn out by arguments. I wanted to get away.

Miss Hurlbird cried terribly when she heard that I was going to stay with the Ashburnhams. She made no clear objection. By that time I knew that Florence had been with Jimmy before I married her. Still, I managed to make her believe that I thought Florence had been a model wife. I still believed that Florence had been faithful to me after our marriage. I had not yet understood the worst.

In truth, I was not thinking much about Florence then. My mind was fixed on Branshaw. I had decided that Edward and Leonora's cables must have something to do with Nancy. I imagined that she might have become attached to some unsuitable young man. Perhaps Leonora wanted me to come and marry Nancy in order to save her from that danger.

That idea stayed firmly in my mind even after I reached Branshaw. For nearly ten days, neither Edward nor Leonora spoke to me about anything important. They talked of the weather, the fields, the horses, and ordinary country matters. There were several young men in and out of the house, but I could not see that Nancy cared for any one of them especially. She looked pale and nervous, but when she spoke to me, she could still become bright and playful.

I thought the unsuitable young man had probably been sent away. I thought Nancy was unhappy because she missed him. It seemed a simple explanation, and I held to it. I was very good at holding to simple explanations. That was one reason why so many terrible things passed in front of me without my seeing them.

What had really happened in that house was hell. Leonora had spoken to Nancy. Nancy had spoken to Edward. Edward had spoken to Leonora. They had talked and talked through long dark hours. There were scenes in half-lit rooms and silent passages. There were feelings moving through the night like things with no faces.

But I did not see these things. I lived inside the charm of Branshaw and noticed only the order. The servants moved quietly and perfectly. My clothes were laid out with such care that the act itself seemed almost kind. Horses were ready when they were needed. Meals came at the right hour. Everyone smiled at the right time

and disappeared at the right time.

To me, Edward, Leonora, and Nancy looked like tender, careful, devoted people. They drove me to meets. They spoke gently at meals. They asked whether I was comfortable. They seemed to be only good people, living in a beautiful old house with quiet habits and good servants. How do such people manage it? How can they look so calm when everything inside them is burning?

I remember Branshaw in those days with painful clearness. The rooms were large and warm, the passages dark, and the air full of old wood and polished leather. Outside, the fields were heavy with rain. Hounds, horses, and riders came and went. It was an English country life of the kind Florence had dreamed about. Yet Florence was dead, and I was there in her place, still unable to read the truth.

Edward was changed, though I did not understand the change. He was polite to me and careful in every small duty. But his face looked tired and hollow, and there were moments when his eyes seemed to see nothing in front of him. Nancy would sometimes begin to talk nonsense to me in her old bright way. Then her voice would fail, and she would look down at her hands.

Leonora seemed almost too calm. She walked through the house as if she were carrying a full cup and must not spill one drop. She watched Nancy, watched Edward, and watched me too. Yet she did not speak. She had sent for me because she thought I might help, but when I came, no one told me how. I was once again the useful man who did not know what use he was meant to have.

So the days passed in a false peace. I thought I was waiting for someone to ask me to save Nancy from a foolish marriage. In fact, Nancy was already standing at the edge of a much darker fate. Edward was already near the end of his strength. Leonora had already done things and said things that could not be taken back. And I, moving among them with clean shirts and proper meals, saw almost nothing.

## Part 20 — Leonora Speaks to Nancy

One evening at dinner, Leonora opened a telegram and said, “Nancy is going to India tomorrow to be with her father.” No one spoke after that. Nancy looked

down at her plate. Edward went on eating his pheasant as if the words had not touched him. I felt sick and confused, because I still imagined that I was somehow expected to propose to Nancy that evening. I thought that perhaps they had called me there to save her from this journey.

But the real story had begun earlier. When they came back from Nauheim, Leonora began to have terrible headaches. They lasted whole days. During them she could not speak and could hardly bear any sound. Nancy sat beside her for hours, silent and still, putting cloths soaked in vinegar and water on her forehead. That long silence gave Nancy too much time to think.

Her meals alone with Edward were not easy either. Sometimes he sat at the table like a broken old man and answered her with only one or two words. At other times he forced himself to talk lightly about horses, hunting, or India. He did this because he thought it was cruel to let the poor girl sit with a dull and miserable companion. But his changes only taught her that Edward was not simply the cheerful, safe uncle she had believed him to be.

Little by little, Nancy began to see that something was wrong between Edward and Leonora. The truth did not come to her quickly. It came in small signs, in silences, in looks, in the feeling of a room after a door had closed. She found Edward alone sometimes, sunk low in his chair, with a face like an old dead man. She began to understand that the house she had loved was not peaceful at all.

One small event made this clearer. Edward met a young man named Selmes, whose family had lost its money. The young man no longer had a horse, and Edward saw that this made him deeply unhappy. At once Edward got off the horse he was riding and gave it to him. Then he remembered that Selmes could not afford to keep it, so he added that the horse could stay in the Branshaw stables until the young man knew what to do.

Nancy thought this was beautiful. She went straight home and told Leonora, who was lying down after one of her headaches. Nancy expected the story to please her. Surely any wife would be proud to have such a generous husband. But Leonora turned on the bed and spoke words that shocked the girl. “I wish to God he were your husband and not mine,” she said. “We shall be ruined. Am I never

to have a chance?"

Then Leonora began to cry. She pushed herself up on one elbow and covered her face with her hands. Tears ran through her fingers. Nancy stood there hurt and confused, as if she herself had been struck. She began to say, "But if Uncle Edward—" and Leonora broke in with bitter words about Edward giving away not only his own shirt, but hers and Nancy's too.

Leonora was in a cruel state of mind. All that day she had imagined Edward and Nancy together, riding across wet fields and coming home in the winter dusk. She had listened for their return with anger burning inside her. When she heard Nancy's cheerful voice in the hall, something in her nearly broke. She hated Edward then, and for one terrible moment she almost hated Nancy too.

That moment left a mark on Nancy's mind. The two women did not speak of it again, but nothing was the same after it. Two weeks passed, full of rain, bad hunting, heavy ground, and dark evenings. Leonora's headaches became less frequent. She hunted once or twice with Bayham near her, while Edward looked after Nancy. The outside of life continued, but the inside had changed.

Then Edward acted. One evening, when he, Leonora, and Nancy were dining alone, he said that Nancy ought to do more for her father. Colonel Rufford was getting old, he said. Edward had written to him, suggesting that Nancy should go out to India. He said this in a slow, heavy voice, looking at the table rather than at either woman.

Leonora cried out, "How dare you?" Nancy put her hand over her heart and called on her Saviour for help. Edward said nothing. He had done what he believed was right. He thought Nancy must be sent away from him before he destroyed her. But the words sounded to both women like a sentence of exile.

That same night, by a dreadful chance, Nancy received a letter from her mother. It came while Leonora was speaking to Edward, so Leonora did not stop it. The letter must have been horrible. I do not know its exact words, but I know what effect it had. Mrs Rufford seems to have told Nancy that she was living in comfort while her mother was ruined and starving.

Mrs Rufford was in Glasgow, and her life there had sunk very low. She may

even have told Nancy that she had no right to call herself Colonel Rufford's daughter. Such words would have been almost impossible for Nancy to understand. She knew little of life outside duty, prayer, and clean rooms. To her, the letter must have sounded like a voice from hell.

While Nancy read that letter upstairs, Leonora went to Edward's room. It was the first time in nine years that she had entered it in that way. Edward sat in his deep chair, surrounded by gun cases, fishing rods, and green-shaded candles. Leonora said that sending Nancy to her father was the most terrible thing Edward had ever done. He did not move or answer.

Leonora was partly thinking of Nancy's fear of her father. The sound of Colonel Rufford's voice could still make the girl tremble. But there was another feeling in Leonora too. She wanted to keep Nancy in the house because Nancy's presence tortured Edward. At that time Leonora was capable of that. Long suffering had made her able to hurt as well as endure.

She told Edward that she knew he was in love with the girl. Then she said that, if he wanted a divorce, she would give him one, and he could marry Nancy. She added that Nancy was in love with him. Edward only groaned. Leonora spoke on because his silence drove her to speak more. At last she left him and went back to her own room.

For a while she sat thinking. Her anger changed into another mood. She told herself that she had failed in everything: in marriage, in money, in religion, and in saving Edward. Then fear came over her. She thought Edward might have killed himself after what she had said. So she went to his room again and opened the door.

He was not dead. He was sitting in his evening clothes, oiling the working part of a gun. Leonora understood that he was doing it only to keep his hands busy, not to prepare his own death. She said coldly, "I did not imagine I should find Nancy here." Edward looked up and answered, "I do not imagine that you did imagine it." Those were the only words he spoke that night.

Leonora went back along the dark passages like a wounded person. Then she saw that Nancy's door was half open and that there was light inside. Their three

doors stood near one another on the gallery: Leonora's, Nancy's, and Edward's. To Leonora, the sight of those open doors was terrible. It seemed as if the black night itself could pass from one room into another.

She went into Nancy's room. Nancy was sitting very straight in an armchair beside the fire. Her black hair had fallen over both shoulders, and she wore a white silk kimono that covered her to the feet. Her clothes were folded neatly on the chairs, as if she had dressed and undressed on an ordinary night. In her right hand she held her mother's letter.

Leonora asked, in a low voice, what she was doing awake so late. Nancy answered, "Just thinking." Then Leonora saw the letter and recognized Mrs Rufford's writing. She could not think calmly after that. It seemed to her that blows were falling from every side. She heard herself cry out that Edward was dying because of Nancy.

Nancy looked past her toward the door. "My poor father," she said. "My poor father." Leonora answered fiercely that Nancy must stay at Branshaw. Nancy said that she was going to Glasgow the next morning because her mother was there. Leonora then said the thing that changed everything. "You must stay here to save Edward," she said. "He is dying for love of you."

Nancy turned her calm eyes on Leonora. "I know it," she said. "And I am dying for love of him." Leonora cried out in horror and grief. But Nancy went on quietly. She said that this was why she was going to Glasgow, to take her mother away, even to the ends of the earth. Then she added, with a terrible simplicity, that she and her mother were no good.

Leonora answered that this was false. "No," she said. "It is I who am no good." Then she told Nancy that she could not let Edward go to ruin for want of her. "You must belong to him," she said. Nancy smiled at her in a strange, distant way, as if she had become much older than Leonora. "I knew you would come to that," she said slowly. "But Edward and I are not worth it."

## Part 21 — Nancy Understands

To understand Nancy's answer to Leonora, I must go back a little. Nancy had been thinking ever since the day Edward gave the horse to young Selmes. That gift had seemed beautiful to her, but Leonora's bitter cry afterward had changed the whole house. Nancy had sat beside Leonora's bed through many silent days. She had also sat through many silent meals with Edward. In that silence, her mind had begun to work.

At first she understood very little. She only saw that Edward looked ill and that Leonora looked angry or exhausted. Sometimes Edward smiled at her with bloodshot eyes and a heavy mouth, and that smile frightened her. It was not the old cheerful smile of Uncle Edward. It was the smile of a man asking for help without words. Slowly, Nancy began to know that Edward did not love Leonora and that Leonora hated Edward.

Several things helped this thought grow in her. One day, because Leonora was ill and Edward had gone out early, Nancy was left alone with the newspapers. In one of them she saw the picture of a woman she knew, Mrs Brand. Under the picture were words about a divorce case. Nancy knew almost nothing about divorce. She had been brought up as a Catholic, and in her world marriage was not something one broke.

She began to read the report because she wanted to tell Leonora about Mrs Brand when Leonora felt better. At first, the case seemed foolish to her. Lawyers were asking where people had gone, who had been in which room, and whether a drawing-room door had been locked. Nancy could not understand why grown men should care about such details. She almost laughed because it all seemed so senseless.

But then the report became dark. Mr Brand had been asked again and again about Miss Lupton, a young woman Nancy knew. Mr Brand kept saying that he did not love Miss Lupton. Nancy thought, of course he did not. He was a married man. To her, marriage ended that question. A married person might be kind or polite to others, but love belonged inside marriage and nowhere else.

As she read on, she saw words about cruelty and another sin that she understood only in a distant way. She knew from religion that such a sin was

forbidden, but she did not really know what it meant in life. She imagined it might have something to do with kissing or holding someone in one's arms. The thought made her feel sick. The paper was suddenly no longer foolish. It was frightening and dirty.

The worst thing was not that Mr Brand had done wrong. The worst thing was that Mrs Brand and Mr Brand had been living in hatred while seeming like ordinary married people. Nancy remembered seeing Mr Brand playing with his children and kissing his wife. She had believed them happy. Now the newspaper said they had been miserable. If that could be true of the Brands, perhaps it could be true of Edward and Leonora.

This thought made her heart beat hard. She asked God why such things were allowed. The whole world seemed less safe. Then another thought rose in her, so quickly that she almost feared it. If Edward did not love Leonora, perhaps he loved someone else. And if he could love someone else, why could that someone not be Nancy herself?

She did not hold that thought clearly for long. It was too frightening and too sweet. After a day or two the sickness passed, and she tried to put the matter away. When Leonora's headaches grew lighter, Nancy told her about Mrs Brand's divorce. She asked what divorce really meant. Leonora, lying weakly on a sofa in the hall, answered that it meant Mr Brand would be able to marry again.

Nancy was horrified. She asked whether marriage was not a sacrament and could not be broken. She had believed that being married was like being alive or dead. You either were married or you were not, and nothing in the world could change it. Leonora answered that this was the law of the Church, but not the law of the land. Nancy then remembered that the Brands were Protestants, and for a short while she felt safe again.

But Leonora then asked her a strange question. She asked whether Nancy herself did not think she would marry one day. Nancy was frightened by the question because it was so unlike Leonora. Still, she answered honestly. She said she did not know that anyone wanted to marry her. Leonora told her that several people did.

Nancy said that she did not want to marry. She wished to go on living with Leonora and Edward. She said she did not think she was in the way or very expensive. If she left, Leonora would need a companion. Perhaps, Nancy added, she ought to earn her own living. She was trying to be practical, but beneath the words she was asking not to be sent away.

Leonora said that money was not the question. Then, I believe, she asked whether Nancy would marry me. Nancy answered that she would marry me if she were told to do so. That was Nancy's training speaking. She would obey if duty required it. But she added that she wanted to go on living at Branshaw. Then she said the dangerous words: "If I married anyone, I should want him to be like Edward."

Leonora cried out in pain, and Nancy thought the headache had returned. She ran for the maid, for medicine, and for wet cloths. It never occurred to her that Leonora's pain came from those words. To Nancy, the sentence had been innocent. She thought she had only said that Edward was the best kind of man. She did not yet know that her own heart had spoken.

For the next three weeks, Nancy thought more and more. The weather was dark. The old house lay in its hollow under black trees. The rain fell, the fires burned, and the rooms seemed full of quiet sorrow. It was a bad place for a young girl to be alone with new thoughts. She had never before thought of love as anything serious. Now she began to remember things she had read in books.

She remembered that love was sometimes called a flame. It was also called thirst, pain, and a sickness of the heart. She remembered that lovers had hopeless eyes and gave deep sighs. She remembered stories in which men drank too much because of love. These had once seemed only book words to her. Now she began to see Edward through them.

Edward's eyes did look hopeless. He did sigh deeply. At times he seemed to burn inside and dry up with some terrible thirst. Nancy became sure that he loved someone other than Leonora. That thought hurt her for Leonora's sake, or so she told herself. But a second pain lived underneath it. She could not bear the thought that Edward might love another woman.

One evening, when Edward was away at a meeting, Nancy went into his gun-room. A bottle of whisky stood on the table beside his chair. She poured a glass and drank it. Fire seemed to go through her body. Her face grew hot, her legs felt strange, and the room seemed unsteady.

She went upstairs and lay in the dark. For a little while she gave herself to forbidden thoughts. She imagined that Edward held her and kissed her face, her shoulders, and her neck. Then shame came over her with such force that her mind could hardly bear it. After that night, she never touched alcohol again. She also pushed those thoughts away so completely that they seemed almost to vanish.

She then decided that her suffering was only pity for Leonora. She would give her life to serving Leonora. She imagined herself like a quiet saint, watering flowers, sewing, waiting, and helping without complaint. At other times, her thoughts became childish and romantic. She imagined going with Edward to Africa and throwing herself before a lion so that he might live for Leonora.

Nancy knew nothing of life except that life must be sad. That was what she had learned. Then came the evening when Edward said she must go to India to be with her father. At first she prayed that God would make the journey impossible. Then she saw Edward's fixed face and understood that he had decided. If Edward decided it, she thought, it must be right. He was still her hero, even while he was breaking her heart.

Yet her mind rebelled. She could not leave Branshaw. She imagined that Edward wanted her away because he loved another woman and did not want Nancy to see it. She was ready, in her confused innocence, to tell him that she could bear even that. She would stay, suffer, and comfort Leonora. She would accept anything if only she did not have to leave that house.

Then came the letter from her mother. It told her that she had no right to live in comfort and respect while her mother lived in shame and misery. It also threw doubt on whether Colonel Rufford was truly her father. Nancy did not really understand the words, but they struck her soul. She imagined her mother sleeping outside in the snow, under dark stone arches. Duty called her toward that fallen mother.

At the same time, she pitied her father. If her mother had left him for another man, then perhaps his violent anger had some cause. Perhaps even the blow he had once given Nancy herself came from pain. Nancy's conscience told her that her first duty was to her parents. That is why, on that terrible night, she undressed carefully and folded every piece of clothing in its place. Order was the only way she could obey duty.

And in that mood Leonora entered her room and told her that Edward was dying of love for her. Then Nancy knew openly what she had known secretly for months. Edward loved her. Edward was dying for her. For one short moment, her spirit seemed to rest. She could leave Branshaw, go to Glasgow, and save her mother, because she now knew the thing her heart had most wanted to know.

## Part 22 — Nancy's Choice

When Leonora told Nancy that Edward was dying for love of her, the words did not fall on Nancy like something new. They fell into place. They made a shape out of many thoughts that had been moving in her for weeks. Suddenly she knew what she had already half known. Edward loved her, and she loved Edward.

That knowledge changed the room around her. She was still sitting near the fire in her white silk kimono. Her hair lay over her shoulders, and her mother's letter was still in her hand. Yet she no longer felt like a frightened girl being ordered by an older woman. She felt strangely calm and high, almost as if she were sitting on a throne. Leonora, who had always seemed so strong and beautiful to her, now seemed smaller and colder.

Leonora kept saying that Nancy must stay to save Edward. She said he was dying of love. She said Nancy must give herself to him, because otherwise he would be destroyed. But Nancy hardly listened. Her mind had moved beyond Leonora's voice. She was proud and happy because Edward loved her, and because she loved him. That fact was enough to fill her whole heart.

At that moment, Nancy felt that Leonora's part was only to care for Edward's body. Nancy believed that she herself held his soul. She imagined Edward's love

as something pure and helpless, something she must carry away and protect. To her, Leonora seemed cruel then. She seemed like an angry creature trying to tear from Nancy's arms the precious thing Nancy had just found.

Nancy did not think of staying at Branshaw as Leonora wished. She thought of going away and loving Edward from a great distance. From Glasgow, or later from India, her love would surround him, protect him, and speak to him without words. She would love him without touching him. She would carry him in her heart and keep him safe by leaving him.

Leonora spoke louder and more sharply. "You must stay here," she said. "You must belong to Edward. I will divorce him." The words were direct and terrible. They were also useless. Nancy answered from the center of her training and belief. "The Church does not allow divorce," she said. "I cannot belong to your husband. I am going to Glasgow to save my mother."

At that moment the half-open door opened fully, without a sound. Edward stood there. His eyes were fixed on Nancy's face, hungry and hopeless. His shoulders were bent forward, and he looked like a man already condemned. He was half drunk. In one hand he held the whisky bottle, and in the other he held a candle that leaned sideways.

He spoke to Nancy with heavy force. "I forbid you to talk about these things," he said. "You will stay here until I hear from your father. Then you will go to your father." The two women hardly looked at him. They were facing each other like two creatures ready to spring. Yet his voice entered Nancy more deeply than Leonora's words had done.

Edward leaned against the doorpost and spoke again. He said that he was the master of the house. His voice was low, male, and full of command, with the dark passage behind him. Nancy's spirit bowed before that voice. She felt, all at once, that she would go to India. She also felt that she would never again speak of these forbidden things, because Edward had told her not to speak of them.

Leonora, however, would not stop. She said that Nancy could now see her duty. She must belong to Edward. He must not be allowed to go on drinking and destroying himself. Nancy did not answer. Edward had already left the doorway,

and they heard him moving unsteadily along the polished floor.

Then there was the sound of a heavy fall. Nancy screamed. Leonora said, “You see!” But the sounds continued below, and the candlelight flickered up through the rails of the gallery. Edward was not dead or badly hurt. He had gone down to the telephone in the hall.

They heard his voice from below. It was level, normal, and patient. Drink had affected his legs, but not his speech. He asked for Glasgow, in Scotland. He asked for the number of a man called White, at Simrock Park. He said he could wait. He added that he had been in communication with them before, and that they must have the number.

Leonora told Nancy that Edward was going to telephone to her mother. She said he would make everything right for Mrs Rufford. Then Leonora got up and closed the door. When she came back to the fire, she spoke bitterly. Edward, she said, could always make things right for everyone except her.

Nancy said nothing. She was sitting in a kind of happy dream. She imagined Edward in the dark hall, sitting low in his chair with the telephone receiver at his ear. She imagined his slow, gentle voice, the voice he used when speaking through the telephone. In the darkness, he was working for her, saving her mother, and setting the world right. She touched the base of her throat with her hand, as if she needed to feel the warmth of her own living body.

Leonora kept talking beside the fire. God knows what she said, for grief and anger had taken hold of her. She repeated that Nancy must belong to Edward. She said that even if there were a divorce, and even if the Church somehow gave a way out, what Nancy and Edward did would still be adultery. But Leonora said it had to happen. Nancy must pay that price because she had made Edward love her.

Leonora’s words became crueler as she went on. She said that Nancy had wronged Edward by being beautiful, gentle, and good. She said it could be a sin to be so good, if that goodness made a man suffer. Nancy must pay for that sin by saving him. She must give herself to the man she had hurt. Leonora spoke as if she were making a religious judgment, but her pain was speaking more than her faith.

Between Leonora's pauses, Nancy could hear Edward's voice below. The words were not clear, but the sound came steadily through the house. Sometimes he stopped, waiting for an answer. Then his voice began again. To Nancy, this sound was full of strength. The man she loved was acting for her. He knew what must be done.

Leonora's eyes were fixed on Nancy, but Nancy hardly looked at her. She hardly heard her. Time passed strangely. It may have been hours. At last Nancy spoke with quiet decision. She said she would go to India as soon as Edward heard from her father. She added that she could not talk about these things, because Edward did not wish it.

That answer broke Leonora. She cried out and moved quickly toward the closed door. Then something happened in Nancy too. She sprang from her chair with her white arms stretched out. She caught Leonora and held her close. "Oh, my poor dear," she said again and again. She did not speak as a rival then, but as one wounded woman to another.

The two women held each other and cried. Then they lay down in the same bed and talked through the rest of the night. They spoke and spoke, while the darkness moved slowly toward morning. Edward could hear their voices through the wall. That was how the night passed in that house, with all three of them awake and suffering.

The next morning they behaved as if nothing had happened. This was one of the terrible powers of that life. At about eleven o'clock, Edward came to Nancy while she was arranging Christmas roses in a silver bowl. He put a telegram beside her on the table. "You can read it for yourself," he said.

As he left the room, he added that Nancy could tell Leonora he had cabled to Mr Dowell to come over. He said that I would make things easier until Nancy left. The telegram was from Mr White in Glasgow. It said, as far as I remember, that he would take Mrs Rufford to Italy. He promised to do it for certain.

The telegram also said that Mr White was devoted to Mrs Rufford and needed no money. He had not known there was a daughter. He was grateful to Edward for showing him his duty. That was the meaning of the message. Edward had arranged

Mrs Rufford's future in the night, while Nancy and Leonora had cried upstairs.

After that, the house returned to its usual course of days. Meals were served, horses were brought out, servants moved through passages, and polite words were spoken. Nancy was still to leave. Edward had sent for me. Leonora watched everything with a calm face. The outer life of Branshaw went on, as if the house had not almost broken apart in the dark.

## Part 23 — The Night of Temptation

This is the part of the story that makes me saddest of all. I ask myself again and again what these people should have done. What should Edward have done? What should Nancy have done? What should Leonora have done? I turn the question over in my mind, and I find no clean answer.

By then the end was almost clear. If Nancy did not belong to Edward, as Leonora said, Edward might die. If Edward died, Nancy might lose her reason. After some time, Leonora, who was the strongest of the three, would probably comfort herself and marry Rodney Bayham. That is what happened, more or less. Two splendid people were destroyed so that one normal person could have a quiet life.

I am writing these words long after the events. Since I wrote the last part of this story, I have seen Provence again from a train. I saw Beaucaire, Tarascon, the Rhone, and the wide open land. Once I thought those places might hold some kind of heaven for me. Now they mean nothing. There is no heaven in olive trees or bright towers when the heart is tired.

Edward is dead. Nancy is gone, though her body is still near me. Leonora is living with Rodney Bayham and, I suppose, is having a calm and proper life. I sit alone at Branshaw Teleragh. I have traveled to Ceylon and seen Nancy in a dark room, sitting still with her wonderful hair around her. She looked at me with eyes that did not see me.

She said only one clear sentence again and again. It was a sentence from the Creed, saying that she believed in one all-powerful God. Those were almost the

only reasonable words she could speak. Perhaps they were very reasonable words. If she can still believe in an all-powerful God after what happened, perhaps her mind has found a place where mine cannot follow.

Do not think of this as romantic. There was nothing romantic in taking tickets, catching trains, choosing cabins, speaking with stewards, and asking what food a silent sick woman might eat. It was only tiring. It was all very tiring. I seem always to be chosen as the useful person, and yet I am never useful enough.

Florence chose me for her purposes, and I did not help her. Edward called me half across the world to talk with him, and I did not stop him from killing himself. Leonora sent me to Ceylon with Nancy's old nurse, because Colonel Rufford hoped someone from Branshaw might soothe his daughter. I went, of course. The nurse went too. We were no use at all.

The doctors in Ceylon said that the sea air and the journey to England might restore Nancy's mind. These are the usual things doctors say. So we brought her back. They did not restore her. She is now sitting in the hall, about forty steps from where I write. She is beautifully dressed, very quiet, and very beautiful. The old nurse takes care of her with great skill.

I cannot marry Nancy. I would marry her if her reason ever returned enough for her to understand what marriage means. But it probably never will. So I am again what I was thirteen years ago. I am the attendant, not the husband, of a beautiful woman who pays no attention to me. That is my life, and it is not dramatic. It is only dull and painful.

Leonora has married Rodney Bayham, and she is angry with me because she thinks I judge her marriage. I do judge it. Perhaps I am jealous. Perhaps I dislike her because Edward and Nancy were sacrificed, and because Leonora survived. Edward wanted Nancy, and I have Nancy, but she is mad. Florence wanted Branshaw, and I bought Branshaw from Leonora, though I never truly wanted it. Leonora wanted Edward, and she has Bayham.

It is a strange world. The things people wanted were almost there before them, yet each person received the wrong thing. I wanted to stop being a nurse, and I am a nurse still. Edward wanted love, and he found death. Nancy wanted duty and

love together, and she lost her mind. Leonora wanted a husband, children, and a proper house, and she will probably get those things at last, though not from the man she loved.

Now I must return to the last days at Branshaw. There was much foolishness in them. Neither woman knew clearly what she wanted. Only Edward chose one clear line, though he was drunk much of the time. Drunk or sober, he held to what his house and his world demanded. Nancy had to be sent to India. She must not hear one word of love from him.

Perhaps this was good for society. Perhaps rules and old ways protect the ordinary world. Perhaps they save the normal people and destroy the unusual ones. Edward had too much feeling. Nancy had a touch of madness. Society does not need too many people like that. So Edward and Nancy were crushed, and Leonora survived.

Yet Nancy had cruelty in her too. I hate to say it, because I loved her. But she wanted Edward to suffer. She did not fully know what she was doing, but she did it. Leonora and Nancy together gave Edward a kind of hell. Night after night he heard their voices through the wall. They talked and talked, while he lay sweating, drinking, and trying not to think.

Day after day, Leonora came to him with the result of their talks. She asked him again and again what he wanted. He always answered, “I have told you.” He meant that he wanted Nancy to go to India as soon as her father sent for her. But once, only once, he said too much. Perhaps he had drunk too much that afternoon.

He said that all he wanted was this: Nancy should go five thousand miles away, but continue to love him. If she loved him from that distance, he could gather himself together and go on living. He wanted no touch, no meeting, no sin, and no reward. He wanted only to know that, somewhere far away, Nancy still loved him. He was a sentimental man, and that was his last hope.

When Leonora heard that, she determined to destroy even that hope. She went to Nancy again and again. She told her that she must save Edward’s life by belonging to him. She said she would get a divorce, even a religious ending to the marriage if that were possible. But at the same time she warned Nancy what kind

of man Edward was.

Leonora told Nancy about La Dolciquita, Mrs Basil, Maisie Maidan, and Florence. She told her of the long suffering of her marriage. She spoke of Edward as violent, proud, drunk, selfish, and ruled by desire. Nancy listened, and the young cruelty in her woke. She loved Leonora too, and woman stood with woman. She began to judge Edward, even while she loved him.

Edward knew what was happening without being told. People living in one house know such things by instinct. He knew that Leonora was closing the last door against him. He could have spoken. He could have defended himself, explained himself, or begged Nancy not to believe everything. But he did nothing. He remained silent, as if silence were the only honor left to him.

Then came the night that was the real hell for Edward. Nancy came to his room. He was lying in bed, with only a small night-light burning. In the dim greenish shadow of the tall bedposts, she rose before him like a figure from a dream. Her long hair fell about her, and her eyes were straight and cruel because she believed she was doing her duty.

She said, “I am ready to belong to you, to save your life.” She did not know clearly what those words meant. She knew only what Leonora had told her: that Edward must be saved, and that she had some terrible payment to make. There was no softness in her offer. There was no love in the way she spoke. It was a sacrifice, and she made sure he knew it.

Edward answered at once. “I do not want it,” he said. “I do not want it. I do not want it.” He meant those words. He later told me that the thought was unbearable to him. Yet the temptation was terrible, not only because of the body, but because of the mind. He knew that, if Nancy once gave herself to him, she would be his forever.

Nancy then said the cruelest thing of all. She said she could never love him now that she knew what kind of man he was. She would belong to him to save his life, but she would never love him. That was the blow. She was offering him the one thing he must refuse, and taking away the one thing he had asked for.

Then Edward gathered himself together. His voice became the old rough, firm

voice he used with a servant or a horse. “Go back to your room,” he said. “Go back to your room and go to sleep. This is all nonsense.” He did not touch her. He did not ask her to stay. He sent her away.

So the two women were beaten at that moment. Leonora’s plan failed. Nancy’s sacrifice failed. Edward kept the last piece of himself clean. But he had also lost the last thing that might have kept him alive. He had refused Nancy’s body, and Nancy had refused him her love. After that, nothing remained except the arranged journey, the calm faces, the proper meals, and the road to the station. Then I came into the scene.

## Part 24 — Safe Brindisi

My coming to Branshaw certainly calmed things for a little while. I stayed there for the two weeks between my arrival and Nancy’s departure. The talking did not stop at night, and Leonora still used every chance to send me out with Nancy while she spoke to Edward alone. But my presence gave the house a kind of public face. While I was there, everyone had to behave like good people at a quiet country house.

Leonora had now learned exactly what Edward wanted. He wanted Nancy to go five thousand miles away and still love him faithfully. He wanted no promise, no touch, and no open sin. He wanted only the thought that, far across the sea, Nancy’s heart remained his. To Leonora this was selfish and terrible. So she tried with all her strength to break that hope.

She told Edward again and again that Nancy did not love him. She said Nancy hated him because of his past, his drinking, his harshness, and his unfaithfulness to Leonora. She said Nancy now saw him as a man promised to many women at once: Leonora, Mrs Basil, Maisie, Florence, and perhaps others in memory. Edward did not answer her. He sat still and took the blows.

Did Nancy still love him? I do not know. Perhaps she did, under all her anger and judgment. She had certainly loved the public Edward: the good soldier, the brave man, the kind landlord, the rescuer of people in danger, and the man who

cared for the weak. But after Leonora told her the private story, Nancy may have felt that all his public goodness meant little. A woman may forgive many things, but she may find it hard to forgive a man who has been cruel to another woman.

I make no law about women. I am only an aging American who has learned very little from life. But I think Nancy had loved Edward deeply before Leonora began her work. I also think she felt that she must punish him once she knew how Leonora had suffered. Her conscience was fierce. Her love and her sense of female duty fought inside her, and the fight broke something.

Edward believed that Nancy still loved him under her anger. He believed that she only pretended to hate him because she wished to be loyal to Leonora. Even later, when the terrible telegram came from Brindisi, he thought it was another act of pride. He thought she wanted to show that she was free, cheerful, and properly angry with him. I cannot say whether he was right.

Leonora said that Edward was selfish because he wanted Nancy's love from far away. She said he wanted to spoil a young life while keeping his own hands clean. Edward said that, if Nancy's love was necessary to his life, and if he did nothing to keep that love alive, then he could not be called selfish. Leonora answered that his wish itself showed a selfish heart. I cannot decide between them.

What I can say is that Edward's actions were correct, almost terribly correct. He did not defend himself when Leonora blackened his name before Nancy. He did not ask Nancy to remember his better side. He did not try to touch her, keep her, or turn her against Leonora. He sat still and let himself be judged. Perhaps he was a fool, but he was an honorable fool at the end.

And all the time, the house looked peaceful. During those two weeks, I did not see one movement that betrayed the truth. No hand shook at dinner. No voice broke in the drawing room. No one gave one strange look across the table. Even now, when I know the whole story, I cannot remember one clear sign that would have told me what was happening.

Leonora kept up the appearance perfectly. She kept it up, in fact, until eight days after Edward's funeral. On the night when she announced that Nancy was going to India the next day, I asked to speak to her privately. She took me into her

small sitting room, and I told her plainly that I wished to marry Nancy. I said that it seemed a waste of money and time to send Nancy to India if Leonora thought there was any chance for me.

Leonora was perfect. She said she approved of me as a possible husband. She said she could not wish Nancy a kinder or safer man. But she also said that Nancy ought to see a little more of life before taking such an important step. Her words were calm, proper, and motherly. If I had known nothing, I would have admired her good sense.

I think Leonora may truly have wished Nancy to marry me, but not at Branshaw or near Branshaw. My plan would have been to buy a house about a mile away and live there with Nancy. That would not have suited Leonora at all. She did not want Nancy within a mile and a half of Edward for the rest of their lives. If I had promised to take Nancy to Philadelphia, perhaps Leonora would have helped me more.

I accepted what she said. I told myself that Nancy was going to India on trial, and that I could follow her later. That seemed reasonable, and I am a reasonable man. I said that I might go after six months, or perhaps after a year. In fact, I did go after a year, though not for the reason I imagined that night.

After speaking with Leonora, I went into Edward's gun-room. I thought I might find Nancy there, and perhaps I had some vague idea of speaking to her before she left. Edward was sitting in his deep chair, smoking. The green candle shades made green reflections in the glass of the cases. The room was very quiet, with guns, fishing rods, and the picture of the white horse above the fireplace.

For five minutes Edward said nothing. Then he looked straight at me. "Old man," he said, "will you drive with Nancy and me to the station tomorrow?" I said of course I would. He looked for a long time into the fire, and then he spoke again in a perfectly calm voice. "I am so much in love with Nancy Rufford," he said, "that I am dying of it."

He had not meant to say it, I think. But he had to speak to someone, and I was there. To Edward, I was almost like a woman, or a lawyer, or some safe listener who did not count as a rival. He talked for much of the night. He spoke of Nancy,

of duty, of silence, of not touching her, and of the strange hope that she might love him from far away.

The next morning was clear and cold, with frost on the ground. The sun was bright, and the road through the heather and bracken was hard under the wheels. I sat in the back of the dog-cart. Nancy sat beside Edward. They talked about the horse, the road, and ordinary things. Edward pointed out some deer far off on the hillside with the handle of his whip.

Near Fordingbridge we passed the hounds. Edward stopped the cart so that Nancy could say goodbye to the huntsman and give him a last coin. She had ridden with those hounds since she was thirteen. Everything was done properly. That was what made it horrible. They were burying a life, and they spoke of horses, roads, and time-tables.

The train was five minutes late. They said it must be because it was market day somewhere along the line. Then the train came in, and Edward found Nancy a first-class carriage with an elderly woman already inside it. Nancy got in. Edward closed the door. Then she put out her hand to shake mine.

No expression showed on any of their faces. The only bright, passionate thing in the scene was the red signal for the train. Nancy was not looking her best. She wore a brown fur cap that did not suit her dark hair. She said to Edward, “So long.” Edward answered, “So long.”

Then he turned on his heel and walked out of the station. His body was large and heavy, and his steps were slow and deliberate. I followed him and climbed back into the dog-cart beside him. It was the most horrible performance I have ever seen. Nothing broke, and for that very reason everything seemed broken.

After that, a strange peace came over Branshaw. Leonora went about her duties with a faint triumphant smile. She had not got Edward back, but she had got Nancy out of the house. Perhaps that was enough for her by then. Edward stopped drinking. He was quiet, polite, and almost cheerful. Once I heard him quote a line in the hall, saying that the pale Galilean had conquered.

He told me that he had no feelings about Nancy now that it was all over. He said I must not worry about him. Later he said that his love had only been a sudden

flame that had gone out. He began to work on the estate again. He shook hands with farmers in the market, spoke at political meetings, hunted twice, and spent much time saving the poor gardener's daughter from prison.

Leonora made a terrible scene about the money he spent on that girl's defense. But otherwise life seemed to go on as if Nancy had never existed. The weather was very still. The rooms were quiet. The servants moved as usual. It looked, from the outside, as if the storm had passed.

You may say, then, that the story has a happy ending. The people who disturbed society were punished: Edward by death, Nancy by madness. Leonora, the normal and proper woman, became the wife of a normal and proper man, Rodney Bayham. She will have a child, and that child will be brought up as a Catholic. Society goes on, and perhaps that is all society asks.

I cannot hide from myself that I now dislike Leonora. Perhaps I am jealous of Rodney Bayham. Perhaps I dislike her because Edward and Nancy, the only two people I truly loved, were sacrificed so that she might live safely in a modern house with a careful husband. I do not know. I only know that, when I think of Edward, I see him in darkness, alone and punished. When I think of Nancy, I see her sitting silent before me.

Yesterday at lunch Nancy suddenly said, "Shuttlecocks." Then she said the word three more times. I think I know what was moving in her mind, if it can be called a mind now. She once told Leonora that she felt like a little object being knocked back and forward between Edward and his wife. Leonora pushed her toward Edward, and Edward silently pushed her back again.

Edward once thought the same thing about himself. He said that the two women passed him between them like a parcel no one wished to pay for. Leonora also felt that Edward and Nancy lifted her up and threw her down as it suited them. So there you have the picture. Everyone was used, and everyone felt used.

I am not preaching against ordinary morality. Society must go on. Perhaps it can only go on if normal, proper, slightly false people succeed, while passionate and too honest people are driven into death or madness. But I do not much like society. I sit here now, an American millionaire who has bought an old English

house of peace, and I have no real life in it.

Soon I shall walk down to the village for the American mail. My tenants and the village boys will touch their hats to me. Then I shall come back and dine with Nancy opposite me, the old nurse standing behind her chair. Nancy will sit beautifully, use her knife and fork correctly, and stare ahead with her wide blue eyes. Once she may pause, as if trying to remember something lost. Then she may say that she believes in an all-powerful God, or she may say only, "Shuttlecocks."

It is very strange to see her beauty and know that it means almost nothing now. Her cheeks have color. Her black hair shines. Her head and hands still have grace. But the picture has no full meaning left. It is like looking at a lovely room where no one can live.

I have almost forgotten to say how Edward died. That is strange, but perhaps it is natural. I have told the moral ending, the social ending, and the afterlife of the story. But the final act itself was very small. It happened one afternoon in the stables.

Edward and I were looking at a new kind of floor he was trying in one of the loose boxes. He was sober, clear-eyed, and quite calm. His golden hair was brushed perfectly. His face had its usual even red color, and his blue eyes looked straight at me. He was talking in a lively way about increasing the numbers of the local soldiers.

A stable boy brought him a telegram. Edward opened it carelessly, looked at it without showing any feeling, and then handed it to me. On the paper, in a large uneven hand, I read the message. It said that Nancy was safe at Brindisi and having a very good time. It was signed with her name.

Edward looked up toward the stable roof, almost as if he were looking toward heaven. He whispered something that I did not hear. Then he put two fingers into his waistcoat pocket and took out a small neat penknife. He said, "You might take that telegram to Leonora." His eyes looked straight into mine, firm and challenging.

I suppose he saw that I did not intend to stop him. Why should I have stopped him? I did not think the world had much more use for him, and I did not think his

tenants, soldiers, charities, or rescued drunkards had the right to make him suffer on their account. When he saw that I would not interfere, his eyes became soft and almost affectionate. “So long, old man,” he said. “I must have a little rest, you know.”

I did not know what to answer. I wanted to say, “God bless you,” because I too am a sentimental man. But I thought that perhaps this would not be proper English form. So I went away with the telegram and took it to Leonora. She was quite pleased with it.