MAY SINCLAIR

THE HELPMATE

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DigiCat, 2022
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BOOK I

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CHAPTER I

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It was four o'clock in the morning. Mrs. Walter Majendie still lay on the extreme edge of the bed, with her face turned to the dim line of sea discernible through the open window of the hotel bedroom.

Since midnight, when she had gone to bed, she had lain in that uncomfortable position, motionless, irremediably awake. Mrs. Walter Majendie was thinking.

At first the night had gone by her unperceived, black and timeless. Now she could measure time by the dull progress of the dawn among the objects in the room. A slow, unhappy thing, born between featureless grey cloud and sea, it had travelled from the window, shimmered in the watery square of the looking-glass, and was feeling for the chair where her husband had laid his clothes down last night. He had thought she was asleep, and had gone through his undressing noiselessly, with movements of angelic and elaborate gentleness that well-nigh disarmed her thought. He was sleeping now. She tried not to hear the sound of his placid breathing. Only the other night, their wedding night, she had lain awake at this hour and heard it, and had turned her face towards him where he lay in the divine unconsciousness of sleep. The childlike, huddled posture of the sleeper had then stirred her heart to an unimaginable tenderness.

Now she had got to think, to adjust a new and devastating idea to a beloved and divine belief.

Somewhere in the quiet town a church clock clanged to the dawn, and the sleeper stretched himself. The five hours' torture of her thinking wrung a low sob from the woman at his side.

He woke. His hand searched for her hand. At his touch she drew it away, and moved from under her cramped shoulder the thick, warm braid of her hair. It tossed a gleam of pale gold to the risen light. She felt his drowsy, affectionate fingers pressing and smoothing the springy bosses of the braid.

The caress kindled her dull thoughts to a point of flame. She sat up and twisted the offending braid into a rigid coil.

"Walter," she said, "*who* is Lady Cayley?"

She noticed that the name waked him.

"Does it matter now? Can't you forget her?"

"Forget her? I know nothing about her. I want to know."

"Haven't you been told everything that was necessary?"

"I've been told nothing. It was what I heard."

There was a terrible stillness about him. Only his breath came and went unsteadily, shaken by the beating of his heart.

She quieted her own heart to listen to it; as if she could gather from such involuntary motions the thing she had to know.

"I know," she said, "I oughtn't to have heard it. And I can't believe it—I don't, really."

"Poor child! What is it that you don't believe?"

His calm, assured tones had the force of a denial.

"Walter—if you'd only say it isn't true—"

"What Edith told you?"

"Edith? Your sister? No; about that woman—that you—that she—"

"Why are you bringing all that up again, at this unearthly hour?"

"Then," she said coldly, "it *is* true."

His silence lay between them like a sword.

She had rehearsed this scene many times in the five hours; but she had not prepared herself for this. Her dread had been held captive by her belief, her triumphant anticipation of Majendie's denial.

Presently he spoke; and his voice was strange to her as the voice of another man.

"Anne," he said, "didn't she tell you? It was before I knew you. And it was the only time."

"Don't speak to me," she cried with a sudden passion, and lay shuddering.

She rose, slipped from the bed, and went to a chair that stood by the open window. There she sat, with her back to the bed, and her eyes staring over the grey parade and out to the eastern sea.

"Anne," said her husband, "what are you doing there?"

Anne made no answer.

"Come back to bed; you'll catch cold."

He waited.

"How long are you going to sit there in that draught?"

She sat on, upright, immovable, in her thin nightgown, raked by the keen air of the dawn. Majendie raised himself on his elbow. He could just see her where she glimmered, and her braid of hair, uncoiled, hanging to her waist. Up till now he had been profoundly unhappy and ashamed, but something in the unconquerable obstinacy of her attitude appealed to the devil that lived in him, a devil of untimely and disastrous humour. The right thing, he felt, was not to appear as angry as he was. He sat up on his pillow, and began to talk to her with genial informality.

"See here—I suppose you want an explanation. But don't you think we'd better wait until we're up? Up and dressed, I mean. I can't talk seriously before I've had a bath and—and brushed my hair. You see, you've taken rather an unfair advantage of me by getting out of bed." (He paused for an answer, and still no answer came.)—"Don't imagine I'm ignobly lying down all the time, wrapped in a blanket. I'm sitting on my pillow. I know there's any amount to be said. But how do you suppose I'm going to say it if I've got to stay here, all curled up like a blessed Buddha, and you're planted away over there like a monument of all the Christian virtues? Are you coming back to bed, or are you not?"

She shivered. To her mind his flippancy, appalling in the circumstances, sufficiently revealed the man he was. The man she had known and married had never existed. For she had married Walter Majendie believing him to be good. The belief had been so rooted in her that nothing but his own words or his own silence could have cast it out. She had loved Walter Majendie; but it was another man who called to her, and she would not listen to him. She felt that she could never go back to that man, never sit in the same room, or

live in the same house with him again. She would have to make up her mind what she would do, eventually. Meanwhile, to get away from him, to sit there in the cold, inflexible, insensitive, to obtain a sort of spiritual divorce from him, while she martyrised her body which was wedded to him, that was the young, despotic instinct she obeyed.

"If you won't come," he said, "I suppose it only remains for me to go."

He got up, took Anne's cloak from the door where it hung, and put it tenderly about her shoulders.

"Whatever happens or unhappens," he said, "we must be dressed."

He found her slippers, and thrust them on her passive feet. She lay back and closed her eyes. From the movements that she heard, she gathered that Walter was getting into his clothes. Once, as he struggled with an insufficiently subservient shirt, he laughed, from mere miserable nervousness. Anne, not recognising the utterance of his helpless humanity, put that laugh down to the account of the devil that had insulted her. Her heart grew harder.

"I am clothed, and in my right mind," said Majendie, standing before her with his hand on the window sill.

She looked up at him, at the face she knew, the face that (oddly, it seemed to her) had not changed to suit her new conception of him, that maintained its protest. She had loved everything about him, from the dark, curling hair of his head to his well-finished feet; she had loved his slender, virile body, and the clean red and brown of his face, the strong jaw and the mouth that, hidden under the short moustache, she divined only to be no less strong. More than these things she had loved his eyes, the dark, bright dwelling-places of the "goodness" she had loved best of all

in him. Used to smiling as they looked at her, they smiled even now.

"If you'll take my advice," he said, "you'll go back to your warm bed. You shall have the whole place to yourself."

And with that he left her.

She rose, went to the bed, arranged the turned-back blanket so as to hide the place where he had lain, and slid on to her knees, supporting herself by the bedside.

Never before had Anne hurled herself into the heavenly places in turbulence and disarray. It had been her wont to come, punctual to some holy, foreappointed hour, with firm hands folded, with a back that, even in bowing, preserved its pride; with meek eyes, close-lidded; with breathing hushed for the calm passage of her prayer; herself marshalling the procession of her dedicated thoughts, virgins all, veiled even before their God.

Now she precipitated herself with clutching hands thrown out before her; with hot eyes that drank the tears of their own passion; with the shamed back and panting mouth of a Magdalen; with memories that scattered the veiled procession of the Prayers. They fled before her, the Prayers, in a gleaming tumult, a rout of heavenly wings that obscured her heaven. When they had vanished a sudden vagueness came upon her.

And then it seemed that the storm that had gone over her had rolled her mind out before her, like a sheet of white-hot iron. There was a record on it, newly traced, of things that passion makes indiscernible under its consuming and aspiring flame. Now, at the falling of the flame, the faint characters flashed into sight upon the blank, running in waves, as when hot iron changes from white to sullen red. Anne felt that her union with Majendie had made her one

with that other woman, that she shared her memory and her shame. For Majendie's sake she loathed her womanhood that was yesterday as sacred to her as her soul. Through him she had conceived a thing hitherto unknown to her, a passionate consciousness and hatred of her body. She hated the hands that had held him, the feet that had gone with him, the lips that had touched him, the eyes that had looked at him to love him. Him she detested, not so much on his own account, as because he had made her detestable to herself.

Her eyes wandered round the room. Its alien aspect was becoming transformed for her, like a scene on a tragic stage. The light had established itself in the windows and pier-glasses. The wall-paper was flushing in its own pink dawn. And the roses bloomed again on the grey ground of the bed-curtains. These things had become familiar, even dear, through their three days' association with her happy bridals. Now the room and everything in it seemed to have been created for all time to be the accomplices and ministers of her degradation. They were well acquainted with her and it; they held foreknowledge of her, as the pier-glass held her dishonoured and dishevelled image.

She thought of her dead father's house, the ivy-coated Deanery in the south, and of the small white bedroom, a girl's bedroom that had once known her and would never know her again. She thought of her father and mother, and was glad that they were dead. Once she wondered why their death had been God's will. Now she saw very clearly why. But why she herself should have been sent upon this road, of all roads of suffering, was more than Anne could see.

She, whose nature revolted against the despotically human, had schooled herself into submission to the divine. Her sense of being supremely guided and protected had, before now, enabled her to act with decision in turbulent and

uncertain situations of another sort. Where other people writhed or vacillated, Anne had held on her course, uplifted, unimpassioned, and resigned. Now she was driven hither and thither, she sank to the very dust and turned in it, she saw no way before her, neither her own way nor God's way.

Widowhood would not have left her so abject and so helpless. If her husband's body had lain dead before her there, she could have stood beside it, and declared herself consoled by the immortal presence of his spirit. But to attend this deathbed of her belief and of her love, love that had already given itself over, too weak to struggle against dissolution, it was as if she had seen some horrible reversal of the law of death, spirit returning to earth, the incorruptible putting on corruption.

Not only was her house of life made desolate; it was defiled. Dumb and ashamed, she abandoned herself like a child to the arms of God, too agonised to pray.

An hour passed.

Then slowly, as she knelt, the religious instinct regained possession of her. It was as if her soul had been flung adrift, had gone out with the ebb of the spiritual sea, and now rocked, poised, waiting for the turn of the immortal tide.

Her lips parted, almost mechanically, in the utterance of the divine name. Aware of that first motion of her soul, she gathered herself together, and concentrated her will upon some familiar prayer for guidance. For a little while she prayed thus, grasping at old shadowy forms of petition as they went by her, lifting her sunken mind by main force from stupefaction; and then, it was as if the urging, steadying will withdrew, and her soul, at some heavenly signal, moved on alone into the place of peace.

CHAPTER II

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It was broad daylight outside. A man was putting out the lights one by one along the cold little grey parade. A figure, walking slowly, with down-bent head, was approaching the hotel from the pier. Anne recognised it as that of her husband. Both sights reminded her that her life had to be begun all over again, and to go on.

Another hour passed. Majendie had sent up a waitress with breakfast to her room. He was always thoughtful for her comfort. It did not occur to her to wonder what significance there might be in his thus keeping away from her, or what attitude toward her he would now be inclined to take. She would not have admitted that he had a right to any attitude at all. It was for her, as the profoundly injured person, to decide as to the new disposal of their relations.

She was very clear about her grievance. The facts, that her husband had been pointed at in the public drawing-room of their hotel; that the terrible statement she had overheard had been made and received casually; that he had assumed, no less casually, her knowledge of the thing, all bore but one interpretation: that Walter Majendie and the scandal he had figured in were alike notorious. The marvel was that, staying in the town where he lived and was known, she herself had not heard of it before. A peculiarly ugly thought visited her. Was it possible that Scarby was the very place where the scandal had occurred?

She remembered now that, when she had first proposed that watering-place for their honeymoon, he had objected on the ground that Scarby was full of people whom he knew.

Besides, he had said, she wouldn't like it. But whether she would like it or not, Anne, who had her bridal dignity to maintain, considered that in the matter of her honeymoon his wishes should give way to hers. She was inclined to measure the extent of his devotion by that test. Scarby, she said, was not full of people who knew *her*. Anne had been insistent and Majendie passive, as he was in most unimportant matters, reserving his energies for supremely decisive moments.

Anne, bearing her belief in Majendie in her innocent breast, failed at first to connect her husband with the remarkable intimations that passed between the two newcomers gossiping in the drawing-room before dinner. They, for their part, had no clue linking the unapproachably strange lady on the neighbouring sofa with the hero of their tale. The case, they said, was "infamous." At that point Majendie had put an end to his own history and his wife's uncertainty by entering the room. Three words and a look, observed by Anne, had established his identity.

Her mind was steadied by its inalienable possession of the facts. She had returned through prayer to her normal mood of religious resignation. She tried to support herself further by a chain of reasoning. If all things were divinely ordered, this sorrow also was the will of God. It was the burden she was appointed to take up and bear.

She bathed and dressed herself for the day. She felt so strange to herself in these familiar processes that, standing before the looking-glass, she was curious to observe what manner of woman she had become. The inner upheaval had been so profound that she was surprised to find so little record of it in her outward seeming.

Anne was a woman whose beauty was a thing of general effect, and the general effect remained uninjured. Nature

had bestowed on her a body strongly made and superbly fashioned. Having framed her well, she coloured her but faintly. She had given her eyes of a light thick grey. Her eyebrows, her lashes, and her hair were of a pale gold that had ashen undershades in it. They all but matched a skin honey-white with that even, sombre, untransparent tone that belongs to a temperament at once bilious and robust. For the rest, Nature had aimed nobly at the significance of the whole, slurring the details. She had built up the forehead low and wide, thrown out the eyebones as a shelter for the slightly prominent eyes; saved the short, straight line of the nose by a hair's-breadth from a tragic droop. But she had scamped her work in modelling the close, narrow nostrils. She had merged the lower lip with the line of the chin, missing the classic indentation. The mouth itself she had left unfinished. Only a little amber mole, verging on the thin rose of the upper lip, foreshortened it, and gave to its low arc the emphasis of a curve, the vivacity of a dimple (Anne's under lip was straight as the tense string of a bow). When she spoke or smiled Anne's mole seemed literally to catch up her lip against its will, on purpose to show the small white teeth below. Majendie loved Anne's mole. It was that one charming and emphatic fault in her face, he said, that made it human. But Anne was ashamed of it.

She surveyed her own reflection in the glass sadly, and sadly went through the practised, mechanical motions of her dressing; smoothing the back of her irreproachable coat, arranging her delicate laces with a deftness no indifference could impair. Yesterday she had had delight in that new garment and in her own appearance. She knew that Majendie admired her for her distinction and refinement. Now she wondered what he could have seen in her—after Lady Cayley. At Lady Cayley's personality she had not permitted herself so much as to guess. Enough that the woman was notorious—infamous.

There was a knock at the door, the low knock she had come to know, and Majendie entered in obedience to her faint call.

The hours had changed him, given his bright face a tragic, submissive look, as of a man whipped and hounded to her feet.

He glanced first at the tray, to see if she had eaten her breakfast.

"There are some things I should like to say to you, with your permission. But I think we can discuss them better out of doors."

He looked round the disordered room. The associations of the place were evidently as painful to him as they were to her.

They went out. The parade was deserted at that early hour, and they found an empty seat at the far end of it.

"I, too," she said, "have things that I should like to say."

He looked at her gravely.

"Will you allow me to say mine first?"

"Certainly; but I warn you, they will make no difference."

"To you, possibly not. They make all the difference to me. I'm not going to attempt to defend myself. I can see the whole thing from your point of view. I've been thinking it over. Didn't you say that what you heard you had not heard from Edith?"

"From Edith? Never!"

"When did you hear it, then?"

"Yesterday afternoon."

"From some one in the hotel?"

"Yes."

"From whom? Not that it matters."

"From those women who came yesterday. I didn't know whom they were talking about. They were talking quite loud. They didn't know who I was."

"You say you didn't know whom they were talking about?"

"Not at first—not till you came in. Then I knew."

"I see. That was the first time you had heard of it?"

Her lips parted in assent, but her voice died under the torture.

"Then," he said, "I am profoundly sorry. If I had realised that, I would not have spoken to you as I did."

The memory of it stung her.

"That," she said, "was—in any circumstances—unpardonable."

"I know it was. And I repeat, I am profoundly sorry. But, you see, I thought you knew all the time, and that you had consented to forget it. And I thought, don't you know, it was—well, rather hard on me to have it all raked up again like that. Now I see how very hard it was on you, dear. Your not knowing makes all the difference."

"It does indeed. If I *had* known——"

"I understand. You wouldn't have married me?"

"I should not."

"Dear—do you suppose I didn't know that?"

"I know nothing."

"Do you remember the day I asked you why you cared for me, and you said it was because you knew I was good?"

Her lip trembled.

"And of course I know it's been an awful shock to you to discover that—I—was *not* so good."

She turned away her face.

"But I never meant you to discover it. Not for yourself, like this. I couldn't have forgiven myself—after what you told me. I meant to have told you myself—that evening—but my poor little sister promised me that she would. She said it would be easier for you to hear it from her. Of course I believed her. There *were* things she could say that I couldn't."

"She never said a word."

"Are you sure?"

"Perfectly. Except—yes—she *did* say——"

It was coming back to her now.

"Do you mind telling me exactly what she said?"

"N—no. She made me promise that if I ever found things in you that I didn't understand, or that I didn't like——"

"Well—what did she make you promise?"

"That I wouldn't be hard on you. Because, she said, you'd had such a miserable life."

"Poor Edith! So that was the nearest she could get to it. Things you didn't understand and didn't like!"

"I didn't know what she meant."

"Of course you didn't. Who could? But I'm sorry to say that Edith made me pretty well believe you did."

He was silent a while, trying to fathom the reason of his sister's strange duplicity. Apparently he gave it up.

"You can't be a brute to a poor little woman with a bad spine," said he; "but I'm not going to forgive Edith for that."

Anne flamed through her pallor. "For what?" she said. "For not having had more courage than yourself? Think what you put on her."

"I didn't. She took it on herself. Edith's got courage enough for anybody. She would never admit that her spine released her from all moral obligations. But I suppose she meant well."

The spirit of the grey, cold morning seemed to have settled upon Anne. She gazed sternly out over the eastern sea. Preoccupied with what he considered Edith's perfidy, he failed to understand his wife's silence and her mood.

"Edith's very fond of you. You won't let this make any difference between you and her?"

"Between her and me it can make no difference. I am very fond of Edith."

"But the fact remains that you married me under false pretences? Is that what you mean?"

"You may certainly put it that way."

"I understand your point of view completely. I wish you could understand mine. When Edith said there were things she could have told you that I couldn't, she meant that there were extenuating circumstances."

"They would have made no difference."

"Excuse me, they make all the difference. But, of course, there's no extenuation for deception. Therefore, if you insist on putting it that way—if—if it has made the whole thing intolerable to you, it seems to me that perhaps I ought, don't you know, to release you from your obligations——"

She looked at him. She knew that he had understood the meaning and the depth of her repugnance. She did not know that such understanding is rare in the circumstances, nor could she see that in itself it was a revelation of a certain capacity for the "goodness" she had once believed in. But she did see that she was being treated with a delicacy and consideration she had not expected of this man with the strange devil. It touched her in spite of her repugnance. It made her own that she had expected nothing short of it until yesterday.

"*Do* you insist?" he went on. "After what I've told you?"

"After what you've told me—no. I'm ready to believe that you did not mean to deceive me."

"Doesn't that make any difference?" he asked tenderly.

"Yes. It makes some difference—in my judgment of you."

"You mean you're not—as Edith would say—going to be too hard on me?"

"I hope," said Anne, "I should never be too hard on any one."

"Then," he inquired, eager to be released from the strain of a most insupportable situation, "what are we going to do next?"

He had assumed that the supreme issue had been decided by a polite evasion; and his question had been innocent of all momentous meaning. He merely wished to know how they were going to spend the day that was before them, since they had to spend days, and spend them together. But Anne's tense mind contemplated nothing short of the supreme issue that, for her, was not to be evaded, nor yet to be decided hastily.

"Will you leave me alone," she said, "to think it over? Will you give me three hours?"

He stared and turned pale; for, this time, he understood.

"Certainly," he said coldly, rising and taking out his watch. "It's twelve now."

"At three, then?"

They met at three o'clock. Anne had spent one hour of bewilderment out of doors, two hours of hard praying and harder thinking in her room.

Her mind was made up. However notorious her husband had been, between him and her there was to be no open rupture. She was not going to leave him, to appeal to him for a separation, to deny him any right. Not that she was moved by a profound veneration for the legal claim. Marriage was to her a matter of religion even more than of law. And though, at the moment, she could no longer discern its sacramental significance through the degraded aspect it now wore for her, she surrendered on the religious ground. The surrender would be a martyrdom. She was called upon to lay down her will, but not to subdue the deep repugnance of her soul.

Protection lay for her in Walter's chivalry, as she well knew. But she would not claim it. Chastened and humbled, she

would take up her wedded life again. There was no vow that she would not keep, no duty she would not fulfil. And she would remain in her place of peace, building up between them the ramparts of the spiritual life.

Meanwhile she gave him credit for his attitude.

"Things can never be as they were between us," she said. "That you cannot expect. But—"

He listened with his eyes fixed on hers, accepting from her his destiny. She reddened.

"It was good of you to offer to release me—" He spared her.

"Are you not going to hold me to it, then?"

"I am not." She paused, and then forced herself to it. "I will try to be a good wife to you."

"Thank you."

CHAPTER III

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It was impossible for them to stay any longer at Scarby. The place was haunted by the presence and the voice of scandalous rumour. Anne had the horrible idea that it had been also a haunt of Lady Cayley, of the infamy itself.

The week-old honeymoon looked at them out of its clouds with such an aged, sinister, and disastrous aspect that they resolved to get away from it. For the sake of appearances, they spent another week of aimless wandering on the East coast, before returning to the town where an unintelligible fate had decided that Majendie should have a business he detested, and a house.

Anne had once asked herself what she would do if she were told that she would have to spend all her life in Scale on Humber. Scale is prevailingly, conspicuously commercial. It is not beautiful. Its streets are squalidly flat, its houses meanly rectangular. The colouring of Scale is thought by some to be peculiarly abominable. It is built in brown, paved and pillared in unclean grey. Its rivers and dykes run brown under a grey northeastern sky.

Once a year it yields reluctantly to strange passion, and Spring is born in Scale; born in tortures almost human, a relentless immortality struggling with visible corruption. The wonder is that it should be born at all.

To-day, the day of their return, the March wind had swept the streets clean, and the evening had secret gold and sharp silver in its grey. Anne remembered how, only last year, she had looked upon such a spring on the day when

she guessed for the first time that Walter cared for her. She was not highly endowed with imagination; still, even she had felt dimly, and for once in her life, that sense of mortal tenderness and divine uplifting which is the message of Spring to all lovers.

But that emotion, which had had its momentary intensity for Anne Fletcher, was over and done with for Anne Majendie. Like some mourner for whom superb weather has been provided on the funeral day of his beloved, she felt in this young, wantoning, unsympathetic Spring the immortal cruelty and irony of Nature. She was bearing her own heart to its burial; and each street that they passed, as the slow cab rattled heavily on its way from the station, was a stage in the intolerable progress; it brought her a little nearer to the grave.

From her companion's respectful silence she gathered that, though lost to the extreme funereal significance of their journey, he was not indifferent; he shared to some extent her mourning mood. She was grateful for that silence of his, because it justified her own.

They were both, by their temperaments, absurdly and diversely, almost incompatibly young. At two-and-thirty Majendie, through very worldliness, was a boy in his infinite capacity for recoil from trouble. Anne had preserved that crude and cloistral youth which belongs to all lives passed between walls that protect them from the world. At seven-and-twenty she was a girl, with a girl's indestructible innocence. She had not yet felt within her the springs of her own womanhood. Marriage had not touched the spirit, which had kept itself apart even from her happiness, in the days that were given her to be happy in. Her suffering was like a child's, and her attitude to it bitterly immature. It bounded her; it annihilated the intellectual form of time, obliterating the past, and intercepting any view of a future. Only, unlike

a child, and unlike Majendie, she lacked the power of the rebound to joy.

"Dear," said her husband anxiously, as the cab drew up at the door of the house in Prior Street, "have you realised that poor Edith is probably preparing to receive us with glee? Do you think you could manage to look a little less unhappy?"

The words were a shock to her, but they did her the service of a shock by recalling her to the realities outside herself. All the courtesies and kindnesses she owed to those about her insisted that her bridal home-coming must lack no sign of grace. She forced a smile.

"I'm sorry. I didn't know I was looking particularly unhappy."

It struck her that Walter was not looking by any means too happy himself.

"It doesn't matter; only, we don't want to dash her down, first thing, do we?"

"No—no. Dear Edith. And there's Nanna—how sweet of her—and Kate, and Mary, too."

The old nurse stood on the doorstep to welcome them; her fellow-servants were behind her, smiling, at the door. Interested faces appeared at the windows of the house opposite. At the moment of alighting Anne was aware that the eyes of many people were upon them, and she was thankful that she had married a man whose self-possession, at any rate, she could rely on. Majendie's manner was perfect. He avoided both the bridegroom's offensive assiduity and his no less offensive affectation of indifference. It had occurred to him that, in the circumstances, Anne might find it peculiarly disagreeable to be stared at.

"Look at Nanna," he whispered, to distract her attention. "There's no doubt about her being glad to see you."

Nanna grasped the hands held out to her, hanging her head on one side, and smiling her tremorous, bashful smile. The other two, Kate and Mary, came forward, affectionate, but more self-contained. Anne realised with a curious surprise that she was coming back to a household that she knew, that knew her and loved her. In the last week she had forgotten Prior Street.

Majendie watched her anxiously. But she, too, had qualities which could be relied on. As she passed into the house she had held her head high, with an air of flinging back the tragic gloom like a veil from her face. She was not a woman to trail a tragedy up and down the staircase. Above all, he could trust her trained loyalty to convention.

The servants threw open two doors on the ground floor, and stood back expectant. On such an occasion it was proper to look pleased and to give praise. Anne was fine in her observance of each propriety as she looked into the rooms prepared for her. The house in Prior Street had not lost its simple old-world look in beautifying itself for the bride. It had put on new blinds and clean paint, and the smell of spring flowers was everywhere. The rest was familiar. She had told Majendie that she liked the old things best. They appealed to her sense of the fit and the refined; they were signs of good taste and good breeding in her husband's family and in himself. The house was a survival, a protest against the terrible all-invading soul of Scale on Humber.

For another reason, which she could not yet analyse, Anne was glad that nothing had been changed for her coming. It was as if she felt that it would have been hard on Majendie if he had been put to much expense in renovating his house for a woman in whom the spirit of the bride had perished.

The house in Prior Street was only a place for her body to dwell in, for her soul to hide in, only walls around walls, the shell of the shell.

She turned to her husband with a smile that flashed defiance to the invading pathos of her state. Majendie's eyes brightened with hope, beholding her admirable behaviour. He had always thoroughly approved of Anne.

Upstairs, in the room that was her own, poor Edith (the cause, as he felt, of their calamity) had indeed prepared for them with joy.

Majendie's sister lay on her couch by the window, as they had left her, as they would always find her, not like a woman with a hopelessly injured spine, but like a lady of the happy world, resting in luxury, a little while, from the assault of her own brilliant and fatiguing vitality. The flat, dark masses of her hair, laid on the dull red of her cushions, gave to her face an abrupt and lustrous whiteness, whiteness that threw into vivid relief the features of expression, the fine, full mouth, with its temperate sweetness, and the tender eyes, dark as the brows that arched them. Edith, in her motionless beauty, propped on her cushions, had acquired a dominant yet passionless presence, as of some regal woman of the earth surrendered to a heavenly empire. You could see that, however sanctified by suffering, Edith had still a placid mundane pleasure in her white wrapper of woollen gauze, and in her long lace scarf. She wore them with an appearance of being dressed appropriately for a superb occasion.

The sign of her delicacy was in her hands, smoothed and wasted with inactivity. Yet they had an energy of their own. The hands and the weak, slender arms had a surprising way of leaping up to draw to her all beloved persons who bent above her couch. They leapt now to her brother and his

wife, and sank, fatigued with their effort. Two frail, nervous hands embraced Majendie's, till one of them let go, as she remembered Anne, and held her, too.

Anne had been vexed, and Majendie angry with her; but anger and vexation could not live in sight of the pure, tremulous, eager soul of love that looked at them out of Edith's eyes.

"What a skimpy honeymoon you've had," she said. "Why did you go and cut it short like that? Was it just because of me?"

In one sense it was because of her. Anne was helpless before her question; but Majendie rose to it.

"I say—the conceit of her! No, it wasn't just because of you. Anne agreed with me about Scarby. And we're not cutting our honeymoon short, we're spinning it out. We're going to have another one, some day, in a nicer place."

"Anne didn't like Scarby, after all?"

"No, I knew she wouldn't. And she lived to own that I was right."

"That," said Edith, laughing, "was a bad beginning. If I'd been you, Anne, whether I was right or not, I'd never have owned that *he* was."

"Anne," said Majendie, "is never anything but just. And this time she was generous."

Edith's hand was on the sleeve of Majendie's coat, caressing it. She looked up at Anne.

"And what," said she, "do you think of my little brother, on the whole?"

"I think he says a great many things he doesn't mean."