

# The Master

BY ALICE BROWN

STILLMAN, senior editor of that magazine which might have been called *The Pride of America*, was walking rapidly away from his office through the November sleet. He was a tall, thin-cheeked man with deep-set eyes, and stiff hair standing straight up from his forehead; and this latter was so expressive a part of his outline that those who were accustomed to his indoor look were apt to cry out upon the hat as an unwelcome disguise. At the corner another tall man, slightly bent, and the more so to-night because he was holding his coat close and scudding under the blast, almost ran into him and stopped an instant in perfunctory apology. But Stillman knew him and held out his hand.

"Why, it's not you, Brainerd!" he said, warmly, against the icy wind. "I didn't know you were in town. Going to the office, were you?"

"I knew I shouldn't find you so late," said the other, "but I was near and thought I'd venture it. On your way home? I'll walk a step with you."

He turned, and they went on together, Stillman with a hand on his friend's arm now in affectionate solicitude. Brainerd meant a great deal to him, not only as the writer of the new serial the magazine had in its safe, but as primary agent in the best part of the literary life signalizing the last quarter-century. Younger men might not prize that life to the exclusion of the active present, Stillman sometimes thought; but though he was editor of a magazine that had got to keep itself up to date, if it meant to live, he was almost sure he did. It was too dark in these down-town byways to show him exactly what manner of look Brainerd was wearing to-night, but he knew, from old contemplation of it in their confabs running through the years when they had found each in the other the nearest approach to some of the answers

life had to give. There was the great forehead, the statesman face with its sensitive mouth and burning eyes, the signs of indomitable will that had, so Stillman believed, wrecked his friend so far as all the chances of a paltry success were concerned, but wrecked him to cast him on what headland of austere achievement only the immortals knew. Brainerd was speaking still, holding his coat tight with one hand and ready to chase his soft hat with the other.

"I had to come up about your letter, Stillman. I really had to. It's wormwood to me to refuse anything you ask, but that I simply couldn't do. Why, that's the crux of the story, the nub of the whole thing. Don't ask me to leave it out. I can't. I won't."

Stillman burst into a delighted laugh. It sounded as if he were glad to be denied.

"Bless you, old man!" he said. "I didn't ask you to leave it out, not *in propria persona*. It was three of the young cockerels in the office. They guided my pen. I told 'em you wouldn't do it, but I was perfectly willing to let them have a try. Don't you worry your head about that. The thing's going in as you wrote it, never fear!"

He had paused before the door of a dingy building, competing in no way with the city's brilliance except in a modest candleshine from its windows.

"See here, Brainerd," he continued, in some hesitation, as if he asked a dubitable thing, "come along in. It's a dinner of the Tribunal, the club I told you about where we pitch into art and letters, and slang one another to beat the band. Come in."

Brainerd shook his head and tried to clutch his collar tighter.

"No," he said, "oh no! I'm not the man for dinners. I've nothing in particular to say, unless I've got my pen in hand, and I'm an awful damper on

the flow of others. I get thinking about things—other things a mile away. That palsies the mirth.”

“But they’d feel flattered,” Stillman urged weakly, as one who would fain believe in the argument he himself advanced. “They’re mostly young men, and it’s an honor to have you sit down with them. They ought to have the sense to know it.”

“Ought to!” Brainerd jeered, yet with a perfect candor. “Well, so they ought, if it’s a question of years, like reverencing your Chinese grandmother because she’s weather-worn. But for anything else! No, no, Stillman, no! you’re well aware they don’t think anything about me except as an old duffer that’s elected to write in a lingo they can’t abide. That’s some of them. They’re the ones that have helped compile a neat little biographical sketch of me tucked away in the editorial pigeonhole somewhere. The rest are the humorists. They wake up once in a while in the silly season or when the mother-in-law joke palls, to give an imitation of me, more or less clever. But tolerate me at dinner! They wouldn’t, they couldn’t. Good-night, old chap. I’m staying at the Pennsylvania over there. To-morrow I’ll drop in to see you.”

Stillman put out his hand.

“Anything on to-night?” he asked. “You wouldn’t let me come round after the dinner? We break up early. Some of the fellows have a night shift, and I can get away with the first.”

“Let you! guess I would. My grate is heaped and there’s a modest coal-hod hard by. We’ll have a pipe.”

So they parted; and Stillman, pausing at the shabby door before he rang the bell, watched his friend away through the storm and wondered, as he did at every sight of Brainerd and every syllable from him, over the fatuity of things here below. Have men, he mused, so veiled their eyes that the vision has to be hung before them in every possible light before they bow to it? He had hoped to see in his own time the sufficient recognition of Brainerd, but the years were going fast and little pewter gods were being set up on every shelf. This meant a great deal to Stillman. He was, in a way, a controller of des-

tinies. Many a writer of potential power had he heartened and welcomed gladly to the august portals of his magazine, and to many a man of mark, undeservedly exploited, had he refused admittance. Yet on Brainerd’s standing he had been able to cast no illuminating glow. He could crown him, but he had to go out and pluck the laurels for it himself. The stubborn public refused to help him. Out of his discouragement he heaved a sigh and went pondering into the low-studded room with its long table, where the talk was just beginning.

When they sat down there were an even twenty of them. The laurel wreath, silent reminder of the meed the world accords, stern, reproachful token no one of them might inherit, lay on the table, its only decoration; thus it was always, the one ceremonial it involved being its burning, in a circle of silence, at the close.

This dinner, though its date was that of a regular meeting, was understood to be especially in honor of Jerry Burton, on the eve of sailing for “abroad.” Jerry had, unaffectedly to his own surprise, made a modest pile of money out of a novel his colleagues regarded slightly, and he, on his part, scored as no good at all, and he now, he as frankly stated, having propitiated the lesser gods and got what he could out of them, meant to take their largess, and live as long as possible in the classic seclusion of Cambridge or Oxford, write essays and sacrifice to the high gods only. He was a little fellow with a weazened face drawn to the point of an ineffectual chin, and sitting beside big Flynn, the dramatic critic of the *Scatterbrain*, he looked even more inconsiderable, and so Flynn told him, though in terms less crudely fitted to the basis of their relative deserts.

“What kind of an emissary are you, anyway, to send over to the United Kingdom?” said he, after the fashion he found suited to his acquiescent chum. “you that have faked up a bally book out of nothing?”

“Not out of nothing,” said Jerry, peering through his wine as if it were a crystal ball and he meant to see the future of more ten-strikes in it. “Out

of reminiscences of other books I didn't fake."

"Right you are. And you're on Easy Street, and look at me! I've done my three columns a day regular for the last eight years, and there's no Oxford in mine."

"There *is* something reminiscent in your book, Jerry, and that's a fact," said Glendon Springs, a freckle-faced young fellow farther down the table. He drew his pale brows together over his pale eyes and scrutinized the statement, having made it. "It's a bad book, infernally bad. You know I said so in my review, so I've a right to say it here. It's bad as they make 'em, but it's reminiscent of something good."

"Oh, I don't know," said Jerry, with a genuine carelessness. The book had never markedly interested him, except as matter for wonder that so much money had been snatched out of it. "Don't ask me."

Stillman looked quickly up at the moment. Something they did not say, and certainly had not even recognized themselves, seemed to suggest to him implications of vital importance.

"You know we've been negotiating with Brainerd for a serial," he mentioned to the man next him, but in a tone to be heard accurately over the small area of talk. "I've been looking it through."

"Same old sixpence?" called a little man, like a beetle, marked off by stiff black hairs and hard black eyes. "Fog so thick you can't see your hand before you? Style twisted into double bow-knots, till you think you're untying macramé lace?"

"What in the blazes is macramé lace?" inquired a rosy, globular man who was eating his dinner almost worshipfully if he chanced on a toothsome morsel, and profanely when his expectations were balked. He wrote poetry of a most delicate and crystalline type—like hoar frost and snow wreaths, said his following. That question was allowed to pale into obscurity, for the editor was continuing in the path his reflections had evidently decreed.

"I'm not so sure it's obscure. I'm not sure but it's devilish clear, if only you've the time to unravel it."

"Trouble is with our day and generation, we haven't time," snapped out a little red-haired man, all spectacles and trembling upper lip. He got his living by dramatic notes, and was in a perpetual state of truculent honesty, defending his point of view with a passionate haste even before it had been assaulted. He was perennially angry and fitted out for the fray by a stiff taste in adjectives. "We haven't time for anything but skimming surfaces. It's damnable, positively damnable. It's stultifying and corrupting, and the punishment for it is that we're condemned to live in the pit of our own fatuity."

Harrison Brisbane, a slow, grave man, who did hack-work on half a dozen dailies, had been looking down at his untouched plate with an air of detachment both from the food and the circle it gave pretext for. He never ate much at these meetings. He never talked much. But when he did speak, the men, even the ones outside easy ear-shot, listened.

"Speaking of failures—" but nobody had been speaking of them. Only each individual had been conscious, down in the midst of bitter acquiescences and old sick desires, that if failure was to be cited, the finger of life would point to him, saying inexorably, "Thou art the man." "Speaking of failures, should you say Brainerd was a failure?"

The question seemed to hang there in air for them to scrutinize, perhaps to pelt with answers. But for a good many minutes nobody took a shot at it. Everybody got thoughtful, but all the faces looked the same complexion. Brainerd most evidently was a failure.

"Haven't you a word to say for him, any of you?" Stillman inquired pleasantly, with a little smile on his lips. "Am I the only one to take a hand? If I do, you'll say it's because I've got his serial."

Jerry, with one of his hasty turns of speech, as if he were jumping into a ring, broke in on the heels of this.

"Trial!" he called. "Trial! John Brainerd to be tried by a jury of his peers!"

"It's an off night. We weren't to try anybody to-night," the globular man objected. He was lifting some bits of mushroom on his fork, and looking as if,

before they were irrevocably eaten, he might like to photograph them and so preserve their sacred memory.

"No," said the little man like a beetle, in his quick, hard voice, "but we can do it informally. Let it be informally. Go on, Brisbane. Bring your accusation."

The slow, grave man seemed to wait for a moment upon his own words, in the sincere determination that they should be of proper weight.

"I was thinking of Brainerd to-day," he said. "I had occasion to review his life briefly for a biographical sketch, the facts of it, and I found myself afterward coloring up the facts so I could see what they meant—just as you might put a dye in clear water to define the shape of the bottle—to see what they meant to the man himself. These are the facts, as I get them. Brainerd began by writing faithful, likable stuff better than any of its day in America. He promised to be one of the immortals—our little two-for-a-cent immortals, best we make. Well, all of a sudden he changed. I don't know whether he got big head or whether he grew up and overtopped us so we can't look up to him without a stiff neck. I don't know what happened to him. But the stuff changed. In the beginning, as they say about the last new machine, any child could run it. Any creature capable of reading English could take up Brainerd's books and understand 'em. Now—"

"Why, now," said the little man like a beetle—"now he's not only obscure, he's a maze, a labyrinth. He that runs can't read it. If it's an honest runner, he makes faces at it, it gets him so mad."

"I wonder what they think about it, the ones that don't run," said the editor, slowly, out of the painstaking consideration he gave every detail of the pageant passing before him, "the old maids in country towns that get a book out of the library, and, if they haven't read it in two weeks, only say they 'haven't quite finished it,' and keep on at their job of half a page a day? I wonder what a ranchman would think out there on the plains—"

"Have to be a college graduate," snapped the red-haired, spectacled fellow.

"Well, let him be a college graduate.

Plenty of university among the cattlemen. I wonder what anybody with time and silence about him like a wide horizon—why, boys, we haven't any time, we haven't any silence. We're hung in a cage like the kind old Balue invented for Louis XI., and every time Wall Street or a spectacular murder case or a new theatre or any other blasted madness of events comes by us, it gives us a twirl. But what would any clear-minded fellow with brains under his scalp say to John Brainerd's stuff if he sat down to it in the stillness—the kind of stillness where you can hear pine-needles dropping round you, or withered leaves?"

There was stillness of that sort at the table for an instant. Every man's mind, in its own particular fashion, returned to some moment of its own when the quiet of life had made itself felt benignly. The little man like a beetle spoke first, in a testy fashion, because the challenge had savored too much of sentiment.

"Well, what's the matter with being clear, anyway? What's the advantage or the special chrisim of advertising you're too obscure for the masses—grammar-school masses? They're a good fair average. Let the grammar-school throw a vote now and then. If I find a spring of water in the wilderness, I don't want to stop and analyze it, do I? No, by George! I want to drink."

"I think, you know, he did a fine thing," said a young fellow with thin light-brown hair and a delicate cheek like a girl's. He wrote such drastic comment and criticism that men had often threatened, in good set terms, to lick him, and then, meeting him, had burst into hoots of laughter at his inconsiderable equipment. "I think Brainerd did a mighty fine thing when he slipped out of the race and retired to that gloomy old place of his down in the country."

"Gloomy!" cried the red-haired man. "I guess you'd be gloomy, and so would your hall bedroom, if you made as little as Brainerd makes in the course of a year. Why, his sales are almost invisible to the naked eye. His half-yearly statement must be a 'perfect and absolute blank.'"

"Yet here's Stillman got him for another serial. Stillman pays—don't you, old boy?"

"Yes," said Stillman, seriously, "we pay, but we can't do it often for Brainerd. The circulation wouldn't warrant it."

"Then what in the name of Jupiter and all his satellites do you have him at all for?" squeaked the red-haired little man.

Stillman smiled and said nothing.

"Now don't you put on that inscrutable look," the little man bade him. "That 'I-could-an'-if-I-would' sort of a phiz! If you know anything to the advantage of Brainerd, tell it, right here and now. He needs it bad enough."

"Bless you," said the globular man, "we know what Stillman has him for. He has him to keep up the tone of the magazine. He's trying to cater to the octogenarians who remember there were giants in New England in those days, and the giants wrote for the magazine he's inherited. He knows the magazine's no such matter now, but he wants to give the octogenarians a solemn feast day once in a while, and hypnotize 'em into thinking the wind's in the same quarter."

But Stillman, though he vouchsafed another smile to indicate he took no offence, still said nothing.

"I've been down there to that dismal hole Brainerd's retired to," said the beetle. "It was an early spring day, and there were puddles in the road and ducks drabbling in 'em and a general smell of mud and nastiness. And there was Brainerd in his big bare library—I don't know whether there was another furnished room in the house, but he had a stack of books—there he was, doing proof and lining and interlining, and making a job the compositor must have cursed him for. I bet it looked like half a dozen temperature charts woven into one when he got through with it."

"You know," said the red-haired man, incisively, as if he bit off the words, "I think myself that was rather splendid of Brainerd, going off down there. He's the only man of us all that's had the nerve to give up the whole bloomin' show of things and retire to a corner to do the work he means to do."

"He's consecrated to it," said Stillman, quietly, "Brainerd is."

But because it was so big a word they

stared at him a moment, and said nothing, even to challenge it.

"Now," said Brisbane, in his manner of weighing what he had to offer, "I've wondered a good deal if the peculiar thing about Brainerd isn't that he's obscure. It's that he's clear. But we're so infernally dull we don't catch on. Don't you know the wireless fellows and their instrument—I don't understand really the smallest thing about it, so if I get it all wrong, don't blame me—they say the thing is tuned to a certain note—G, it may be, or A. And if they don't get a response, they change their tune. Now, we don't get Brainerd really, any of us, but it's because he isn't tuned to our pitch, and he's so—so inevitable, he won't change his tune."

"Well, then, he may as well be writing his runic rhymes on a piece of brick and tucking them into the sand," said the red-haired man, "for all the good they do."

"Yes, that's pretty much it; for if they're tucked into the sand, Man Friday's foot 'll stumble over 'em some day, and they'll be fished out and Crusoe 'll read 'em."

"Well, I like that," said Jerry. "You assume Crusoe's going to be so much cleverer than we are, do you?"

"Oh, by all odds," said Brisbane. "I think he's going to be clever enough to understand how particularly important it is to sit still and translate the little pen scratches Brainerd's been making all these years, down in his dim old nest."

"Oh, Brainerd isn't great," said the black beetle, decisively. "That's the thing you'd say about a chap that was great, posterity and all that. No, he isn't great."

"I'm not prepared to say he is," Brisbane retorted. "Only, you ask Stillman. I'll abide by what he tells you."

But Stillman would not speak. He only smiled again his smile of a tolerant obscurity and then vouchsafed the same excuse:

"Oh, I can't exploit Brainerd. You'd think I was pushing the serial. Some of you fellows that write notices would say I was working you. Besides, I like him too well."

Glendon Springs took a leap here from Brainerd, the unsung, to Jerry Burton,

sitting with "all his blushing honors thick upon him."

"I know who it is your book's reminiscent of, Burton," he called, in the shrill delight of discovery, so loudly that all of them turned that way. "What a fool I was not to spot it earlier! Wish I'd said it in my column. Why, it's Brainerd."

"The deuce it is!" said Jerry, placidly eating his roast. "How do you make that out?"

"Why, it's his very fist put to another purpose than he uses it for. It's Brainerd cheapened, to sell."

"Yes," said the globular man, dreamily regarding a crackly bit of fat and then deciding what cubic measure of bread would fit it. "I see that. It's the use of the adjective, it's that trick of tacking your preposition on to the end instead of minding the grammarians. It's the cadence of the sentence, too. You're a nice little boy, Glendon, a nice clever little boy to think that out."

Jerry was undisturbed.

"Well," he said, with philosophy, "don't lay it up against me. If I did, I didn't know it."

"Why, of course you don't know it," the red-haired man declaimed, piercingly. "We don't any of us know it, but we have to sit up nights to keep from falling into Brainerd's pesky style. If you've once read him it clings to you; if you keep on reading him you get saturated and you're lost."

"We find that in the office," said Stillman, unobtrusively. "I couldn't tell you the number of stories that are flung aside every week without further consideration because they're flagrant imitations of Brainerd. And yet, not imitations. It's unconscious, all of it, I'm willing to swear."

"Oh, I don't know what's imitation and what isn't," said the beetle man, gloomily. "Or rather, I know, but it wouldn't be popular to tell. Look at that fellow out West that took a prize from the *Flittermouse*. That story was Brainerd, nothing but Brainerd, in the form of it. I'm not prepared to say the fellow didn't know what he was doing. I think he did."

"Little Jerry didn't know, though," said Burton, with an unmoved front.

"He wrote his little book just as nice and careful out of his own head; and the public, they bought it and bought it and bought it, and paid down their good money, and look at little Jerry to-day! Here he sits, the target of every eye, and his steamer ticket's at home pinned on to a cushion embroidered for him by an unknown girl that said she liked his book."

But nobody could laugh. They were all thinking too hard. Only Stillman looked a little breathless, like one running a race and seeing the goal before him.

"But why," said Brisbane, slowly, in his manner of always asking why and cogitating profoundly on the conclusion he meant to make when the data were all in, "if Brainerd's so unpopular—if he can't make his pile like Jerry here, if he can't rake in *kudos*, if the judicious grieve and the ribald laugh—why are they all imitating him?"

"Because they don't know they are imitating him," said Glendon Springs, eagerly, as if he had made the best of discoveries. "They've caught it."

"You don't know you've got typhoid till the germ develops and the doctor tells you so," said the red-haired man.

"Oh, no, they don't know it."

"Well, why are they praised? Why do they make money?" Stillman offered slowly, as if the answer were of the greatest importance and he was trying their pulse and noting every beat, "when he's so far from any sort of worldly stunt?"

"Because they've translated it into the language the market understands," said Glendon Springs. He answered quietly, but his eyes shone. "He's dug out the gold. They've minted it. They've put it into circulation."

"I shouldn't say his was the virgin gold, the ingot," said Brisbane. "I should say Brainerd had put it into a statue—into a whole gallery of statues—and nobody's rich enough to buy such statuary. Nobody's got the eye to want it, maybe, or the great gallery to put it in."

"If we're going to talk in figures," said Jerry, "I'll have a hack at it and say, if his statues are gold, the rest of us have made ours out of base metal."

But they sell. Don't forget my steamer ticket pinned to that cushion. They sell."

"There seems to be the biggest sort of injustice in that," said Brisbane. "Is Brainerd going to die the death of the failure while little folks like our Jerry here go down to posterity?"

"Oh, posterity!" the red-haired man flung in. "Posterity! that's another pair of sleeves. If you talk about posterity—"

"When you go into a picture-gallery Over There," said Stillman, indicating the continent of Europe with a generous sweep of his thumb, "how much time do you spend on the pictures labelled 'School of Raphael,' 'School of Perugino'?"

"Yes," said Jerry, sunnily, "tell us, you fellows, that have made the grand tour. I want to know, so I can remember what to do myself."

"Don't you," said Stillman, with an unmoved gravity, "turn to Raphael and Perugino themselves?"

The red-haired man was leaning over the table and scowling at Stillman, but, it seemed, in pure curiosity and the effort of thought.

"Well, then," said he, in a burst of appeal, "will you tell me why in thunder Brainerd takes such a lot of reading to get at what he's going to say?"

Stillman seemed to feel that this was the moment for a direct statement he had never made before.

"Because he's got more to say than anybody else."

"What's he wrap it round for in so many coils? What's he weave it so fine for, too fine for the naked eye?"

"Count the threads in the widest tapestry ever made," said Stillman, "the tapestry crowded with the biggest figures. You'll find they're multitudinous. Then pick up the old cushion at home, the one on the rocking-chair in great-aunt's parlor. Got a watch-dog on it, or maybe a stag's head. Count your threads there. Any child could do it."

Every man looked at his plate or studied the face of his opposite neighbor, absorbed like his own. The red-haired man broke the stillness.

"Well," said he, "I gather that the sense of the meeting points to the idea that Brainerd's misunderstood, not appreciated."

"Oh, no," said Stillman, "not that. Only referred—he wouldn't appeal himself, but some of us can appeal for him—to the higher tribunal."

"What's that, Stillman?" Brisbane asked.

"The future." After a moment, Stillman went on. A light had broken out upon his face, and he talked eagerly as one who had something of incredible value to share with them. "Why, don't you see what you've said here to-night? You've owned Brainerd works a spell you can't escape. You scoff at his style, but you tear off samples from it and go and have waistcoats made of it as much like it as you can manage. Why, boys, he's our master."

It was by one impulse, it seemed, that they were on their feet. Jerry, perhaps, it was who led—Jerry, whose dinner this had been, and who had seen it converted into a ceremonial before an actual shrine. He at any rate proposed the toast, "The Master."

They drank it in silence. No such meeting of the Tribunal had seen them so moved, all of them in precisely the same way. Something in the talk, the recurrence to ineffable ideals, the martyrdom of obscurity decreed to genius in its lifetime, appealed to that old self each man had believed in, at one stage, as his own indubitable possession, seeing it pierce the darkness of contemporary dullness like a star. For a moment it seemed possible to attain, not the world's suffrages, but a foothold on that steep where climbing is its own present reward. Chairs were pushed back then, and the meeting was understood to be over. No man felt like dropping into the familiarity of an informal conclave as it had been on other nights. But Stillman's voice recalled them.

"Brainerd is here in town. Shall I tell him we—well, I'll tell him we drank to him, at least."

His eyes sought Brisbane's with perhaps a suggestion in them, almost a prayer, and Brisbane leaned over and lifted the laurel wreath in both his hands.

"Take him"—he halted for the confirmation he did not need, and challenged the other acquiescent faces—"take him this."

# The Wild Olive

A NOVEL

By the Author of "The Inner Shrine"

## CHAPTER XVIII

THE feeling of being equal to anything she might have to face continued with Miriam. Now that the moment for action had arrived, she had confidence in her ability to meet it, since it had to be done. At dinner she was able to talk to Wayne on indifferent topics, and later, when he had retired to his den to practise his Braille, she sat down in the drawing-room with a book. Noticing that she wore the severe black dress in which she had assisted at the "killing off" of Evie's family, she brightened it with a few unobtrusive jewels, so as to look less like the Tragic Muse. The night being cold, a cheerful fire burned on the hearth, beside which she sat down and waited.

When Strange was shown in, about half past eight, it seemed to her best not to rise to receive him. Something in her repose, or in her dignity, gave him the impression of arriving before a tribunal, and he began his explanations almost from the doorway.

"I got your note. Young Merrow caught me at dinner. I was dining alone, so that I could come at once."

"You're very kind. I'm glad you were able to do it. Won't you sit down?"

Without offering her hand, she indicated a high armchair, suitable for a man, on the other side of the hearth. He seated himself with an air of expectation, while she gazed pensively at the fire, speaking at last without looking up.

"I hear Miss Jarrott has begun to announce your engagement to Evie."

"I understood she was going to, to a few intimate friends."

"And you allowed it?"

"As you see."

"Didn't you know that I should have to take that for a signal?"

"I've never given you to understand that a signal wouldn't come—if you required one."

"No; but I hoped—" She broke off, continuing to gaze at the fire. "Do you remember," she began again—"do you remember telling me—that evening on the shore of Lake Champlain—just before you went away—that if ever I needed your life, it would be at my disposal—to do with as I chose?"

"I do."

"Then I'm going to claim it." She did not look up, but she heard him change his position in his chair. "I shouldn't do it if there was any other way. I'm sure you understand that. Don't you?" she insisted, glancing at him for an answer.

"I know you wouldn't do it, unless you were convinced there was a reason."

"I've tried to be just to you, and to see things from your point of view. I do; I assure you. If I were in your position I should feel as you do. But I'm not in your position. I'm in one of great responsibility, toward Evie and toward her friends."

"I don't see what you owe to them."

"I owe them the loyalty that every human being owes to every other."

"To every other—except me."

"I'm loyal to you at least, whoever else may not be. But it wouldn't be loyalty if I let you marry Evie. I'm going to ask you—not to do it—to go away—to leave her alone—to go—for good."

There was a long silence. When he spoke, it was hoarsely, but otherwise without change of tone.

"Is that what you meant?—just now?"

"Yes. That's what I meant."

"Do you intend me to get out of New York, to go back to the south—?"