

The Line of Least Resistance

Edith Wharton

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I.

MILLICENT was late as usual. Mr. Mindon, returning unexpectedly from an interrupted yacht-race, reached home with the legitimate hope of finding her at luncheon; but she was still out. "Was she lunching out then?" he asked the butler, who replied, with the air of making an uncalled-for concession to his master's curiosity, that Mrs. Mindon had given no orders about luncheon.

Mr. Mindon, on this negative information (it was the kind from which his knowledge of his wife's movements was mainly drawn), sat down to the grilled cutlet and glass of Vichy that represented his share in the fabulous daily total of the chef's book. Mr. Mindon's annual food-consumption probably amounted to about half of one per cent. on his cook's perquisites, and of the other luxuries of his complicated establishment he enjoyed considerably less than this fraction. Of course, it was nobody's fault but his own. As Millicent pointed out, she couldn't feed her friends on mutton-chops and Vichy because of his digestive difficulty, nor could she return their hospitality by asking them to play croquet with the children because that happened to be Mr. Mindon's chosen pastime. If that was the kind of life he wanted to lead he should have married a dyspeptic governess, not a young confiding girl, who little dreamed what marriage meant when she passed from her father's roof into the clutches of a tyrant with imperfect gastric secretions.

It was his fault, of course, but then Millicent had faults too, as she had been known to concede when she perceived that the contemplation of her merits was beginning to pall; and it did seem unjust to Mr. Mindon that their life should be one long adaptation to Millicent's faults at the expense of his own. Millicent was unpunctual but that gave a sense of her importance to the people she kept waiting; she had nervous attacks but they served to excuse her from dull dinners and family visits; she was bad-tempered but that merely made the servants insolent to Mr. Mindon; she was extravagant but that simply necessitated Mr. Mindon's curtailing his summer holiday and giving a closer attention to business. If ever a woman had the qualities of her faults, that woman was Millicent. Like the legendary goose, they laid golden eggs for her, and she nurtured them tenderly in return. If Millicent had been a perfect wife and mother, she and Mr. Mindon would probably have spent their summer in the depressing promiscuity of hotel piazzas. Mr. Mindon was shrewd enough to see that he reaped the advantages of his wife's imperfect domesticity, and that if her faults were the making of her, she was the making of him. It was therefore unreasonable to be angry with Millicent, even if she were late for luncheon, and Mr. Mindon, who prided himself on being a reasonable man, usually found some other outlet for his wrath.

On this occasion it was the unpunctuality of the little girls. They came in with their governess some minutes after he was seated: two small Millicents, with all her arts in miniature. They arranged their frocks carefully before

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seating themselves and turned up their little Greek noses at the food. Already they showed that it was the unpunctuality of the little girls. They came in with their governess some minutes after he was seated: two small Millicents, with all her arts in miniature. They arranged their frocks carefully before seating themselves and turned up their little Greek noses at the food. Already they showed signs of finding fault with as much ease and discrimination as Millicent; and Mr. Mindon knew that this was an accomplishment not to be undervalued. He himself, for example, though Millicent charged him with being a discontented man, had never acquired her proficiency in depreciation; indeed, he sometimes betrayed a mortifying indifference to trifles that afforded opportunity for the display of his wife's fastidiousness. Mr. Mindon, though no biologist, was vaguely impressed by the way in which that accomplished woman had managed to transmit an acquired characteristic to her children: it struck him with wonder that traits of which he had marked the incipience in Millicent should have become intuitions in her offspring. To rebuke such costly replicas of their mother seemed dangerously like scolding Millicent — and Mr. Mindon's hovering resentment prudently settled on the governess.

He pointed out to her that the children were late for luncheon.

The governess was sorry, but Gladys was always unpunctual. Perhaps her papa would speak to her.

Mr. Mindon changed the subject. "What's that at my feet? There's a dog in the room!"

He looked round furiously at the butler, who gazed impartially over his head. Mr. Mindon knew that it was proper for him to ignore his servants, but was not sure to what extent they ought to reciprocate his treatment.

The governess explained that it was Gwendolen's puppy.

"Gwendolen's puppy? Who gave Gwendolen a puppy?"

"Fwank Antwim," said Gwendolen through a mouthful of mushroom soufflé.

"Mr. Antrim," the governess suggested, in a tone that confessed the futility of the correction.

"We don't call him Mr. Antrim; we call him Frank; he likes us to," said Gladys icily.

"You'll do no such thing!" her father snapped.

A soft body came in contact with his toe. He kicked out viciously, and the room was full of yelping.

"Take the animal out instantly!" he stormed: dogs were animals to Mr. Mindon. The butler continued to gaze over his head, and the two footmen took their cue from the butler.

"I won't — I won't — I won't let my puppy go!" Gwendolen violently lamented.

But she should have another, her father assured her — a much handsomer and more expensive one; his darling should have a prize dog; he would telegraph to New York on the instant.

"I don't want a prize dog; I want Fwank's puppy!"

Mr. Mindon laid down his fork and walked out of the room, while the governess, cutting up Gwendolen's nectarine, said, as though pointing out an error in syntax, "You've vexed your papa again."

"I don't mind vexing papa — nothing happens," said Gwendolen, hugging her puppy; while Gladys, disdainful of the subject of dispute, contemptuously nibbled caramels. Gladys was two years older than Gwendolen and had outlived the first freshness of her enthusiasm for Frank Antrim, who, with the notorious indiscriminate of the grown-up, always gave the nicest presents to Gwendolen.

Mr. Mindon, crossing his marble hall between goddesses whose dishabille was still slightly disconcerting to his traditions, stepped out on the terrace above the cliffs. The lawn looked as expensive as a velvet carpet woven in one piece; the flower-borders contained only exotics; and the stretch of blue-satin Atlantic had the air of being furrowed only by the keels of pleasure-boats. The scene, to Mr. Mindon's imagination, never lost the keen edge of its costliness; he had yet to learn Millicent's trick of regarding a Newport villa as a mere pied ^à terre; but he could not help reflecting that, after all, it was to him she owed her fine sense of relativity. There are certain things one must possess in order not to be awed by them, and it was he who had enabled Millicent to take a Newport villa for granted. And still she was not satisfied! She had reached the point where taking the exceptional as a matter of course becomes in itself a matter of course; and Millicent could not live without novelty. That was the worst of it: she discarded her successes as rapidly as her gowns; Mr. Mindon felt a certain breathlessness in retracing her successive manifestations. And yet he had always made allowances: literally and figuratively, he had gone on making larger and larger allowances, till his whole income, as well as his whole point of view, was practically at Millicent's disposal. But, after all, there was a principle of give and take — if only Millicent could

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have been brought to see it! One of Millicent's chief sources of strength lay in her magnificent obtuseness: there were certain obligations that simply didn't exist for her, because she couldn't be brought to see them, and the principle of give and take (a favorite principle of Mr. Mindon's) was one of them.

There was Frank Antrim, for instance. Mr. Mindon, who had a high sense of propriety, had schooled himself, not without difficulty, into thinking Antrim a charming fellow. No one was more alive than Mr. Mindon to the expediency of calling the Furies the Eumenides. He knew that as long as he chose to think Frank Antrim a charming fellow, everything was as it should be and his home a temple of the virtues. But why on earth did Millicent let the fellow give presents to the children? Mr. Mindon was dimly conscious that Millicent had been guilty of the kind of failure she would least have liked him to detect — a failure in taste, — and a certain exultation tempered his resentment. To anyone who had suffered as Mr. Mindon had from Millicent's keenness in noting such lapses in others, it was not unpleasant to find that she could be "bad form." A sense of unwonted astuteness fortified Mr. Mindon's wrath. He felt that he had every reason to be angry with Millicent, and decided to go and scold the governess; then he remembered that it was bad for him to lose his temper after eating, and, drawing a small phial from his pocket, he took a pepsin tablet instead.

Having vented his wrath in action, he felt calmer, but scarcely more happy. A marble nymph smiled at him from the terrace; but he knew how much nymphs cost, and was not sure that they were worth the price. Beyond the shrubberies he caught a glimpse of domed glass. His green-houses were the finest in Newport; but since he neither ate fruit nor wore orchids, they yielded at best an indirect satisfaction. At length he decided to go and play with the little girls; but on entering the nursery he found them dressing for a party, with the rapt gaze and fevered cheeks with which Millicent would presently perform the same rite. They took no notice of him, and he crept downstairs again.

His study table was heaped with bills, and as it was bad for his digestion to look over them after luncheon, he wandered on into the other rooms. He did not stay long in the drawing-room: it evoked too vividly the evening hours when he delved for platitudes under the inattentive gaze of listeners who obviously resented his not being somebody else. Much of Mr. Mindon's intercourse with ladies was clouded by the sense of this resentment, and he sometimes avenged himself by wondering if they supposed he would talk to them if he could help it. The sight of the dining-room door increased his depression by recalling the long dinners where, with the pantry-draught on his neck, he languished between the dullest women of the evening. He turned away; but the ball-room beyond roused even more disturbing associations: an orchestra playing all night (Mr. Mindon crept to bed at eleven), carriages shouted for under his windows, and a morrow like the day after an earthquake.

In the library he felt less irritated but not more cheerful. Mr. Mindon had never quite known what the library was for: it was like one of those mysterious ruins over which archaeology endlessly disputes. It could not have been intended for reading, since no one in the house ever read, except an under-housemaid charged with having set fire to her bed in her surreptitious zeal for fiction; and smoking was forbidden there, because the hangings held the odor of tobacco. Mr. Mindon felt a natural pride in being rich enough to permit himself a perfectly useless room; but not liking to take the bloom from its inutility by sitting in it, he passed on to Millicent's boudoir.

Here at least was a room of manifold purposes, the centre of Millicent's complex social system. Mr. Mindon entered with the awe of the modest investor treading the inner precincts of finance. He was proud of Millicent's social activities and liked to read over her daily list of engagements and the record of the invitations she received in a season. The number was perpetually swelling, like a rising stock. Mr. Mindon had a vague sense that she would soon be declaring an extra dividend. After all, one must be lenient to a woman as hard-working as Millicent. All about him were the evidences of her toil: her writing-table disappeared under an avalanche of notes and cards; the waste-paper basket overflowed with torn correspondence; and, glancing down, Mr. Mindon saw a crumpled letter at his feet. Being a man of neat habits, he was often tried by Millicent's genial disorder; and his customary rebuke was the act of restoring the strayed object to its place.

He stooped to gather the bit of paper from the floor. As he picked it up his eye caught a word; he smoothed the page and read on. . . .

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II.

HE seemed to be cowering on the edge of a boiling flood, watching his small thinking faculty spin round out of reach on the tumult of his sensations. Then a fresh wave of emotion swept the tiny object — the quivering imperceptible ego — back to shore, and it began to reach out drowned tentacles in a faint effort after thought.

He sat up and glanced about him. The room looked back at him, coldly, unfamiliarly, as he had seen Millicent look when he asked her to be reasonable. And who are you? the walls seemed to say. Who am I? Mr. Mindon heard himself retorting. I'll tell you, by God! I'm the man that paid for you — paid for every scrap of you: silk hangings, china rubbish, glasses, chandeliers, — every Frenchified rag of you. Why, if it weren't for me and my money you'd be nothing but a brick-and-plaster shell, naked as the day you were built — no better than a garret or a coal-hole. Why, you wouldn't be at all if I chose to tear you down. I could tear the whole house down, if I chose.

He paused, suddenly aware that his eyes were on a photograph of Millicent, and that it was his wife he was apostrophizing. Her lips seemed to shape a "hush:" when he said things she didn't like she always told him not to talk so loud. Had he been talking loud? Well, who was to prevent him? Wasn't the house his and everything in it? Who was Millicent, to bid him hush?

Mr. Mindon felt a sudden increase of stature. He strutted across the room. Why, of course, the room belonged to him, the house belonged to him, and he belonged to himself! That was the best of it! For years he had been the man that Millicent thought him, the mere projection of her disdain; and now he was himself.

It was odd how the expression of her photograph changed, melting, as her face did, from contempt to cajolery, in one of those transitions that hung him breathless on the skirts of her mood. She was looking at him gently now, sadly almost, with the little grieved smile that seemed always to anticipate and pardon his obtuseness. Ah, Millicent! The clock struck and Mr. Mindon stood still. Perhaps she was smiling so now — or the other way. He could have told the other fool where each of her smiles led. There was a fierce enjoyment in his sense of lucidity. He saw it all now. Millicent had kept him for years in bewildered subjection to exigencies as inscrutable as the decrees of Providence; but now his comprehension of her seemed a mere incident in his omniscience.

His sudden translation to the absolute gave him a curious sense of spectatorship: he seemed to be looking on at his own thoughts. His brain was like a brightly lit factory, full of flying wheels and shuttles. All the machinery worked with the greatest rapidity and precision. He was planning, reasoning, arguing, with unimagined facility: words flew out like sparks from each revolving thought. But suddenly he felt himself caught in the wheels of his terrific logic, and swept round, red and shrieking, till he was flung off into space.

The acuter thrill of one sobbing nerve detached itself against his consciousness. What was it that hurt so? Someone was speaking: a voice probed to the central pain, —

"Any orders for the stable, sir?"

And Mr. Mindon found himself the mere mouth-piece of a roving impulse that replied, —

"No; but you may telephone for a cab for me — at once."

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III.

HE drove to one of the hotels. He was breathing more easily now, restored to the safe level of conventional sensation. His late ascent to the rarefied heights of the unexpected had left him weak and exhausted; but he gained reassurance from the way in which his thoughts were slipping back of themselves into the old grooves. He was feeling, he was sure, just as a gentleman ought to feel; all the consecrated phrases — "outraged honor," "a father's heart," "the sanctity of home" — were flocking glibly at his call. He had the self-confidence that comes of knowing one has on the right clothes. He had certainly done the proper thing in leaving the house at once; but, too weak and tired to consider the next step, he yielded himself to one of those soothing intervals of abeyance when life seems to wait submissively at the door.

As his cab breasted the current of the afternoon drive he caught the greeting of the lady with whom he and Millicent were to have dined. He was troubled by the vision of that disrupted dinner. He had not yet reached the point of detachment at which offending Mrs. Targe might become immaterial, and again he felt himself jerked out of his grooves. What ought he to do? Millicent, now, could have told him — if only he might have consulted Millicent! He pulled himself together and tried to think of his wrongs.

At the hotel, the astonished clerk led him upstairs, unlocking the door of a room that smelt of cheap soap. The window had been so long shut that it opened with a jerk, sending a shower of dead flies to the carpet. Out along the sea-front, at that hour, the south-wind was hurrying the waters, but the hotel stood in one of the sheltered streets, where in midsummer there is little life in the air. Mr. Mindon sat down in the provisional attitude of a visitor who is kept waiting. Over the fireplace hung a print of the Landing of Columbus; a fly-blown portrait of General Grant faced it from the opposite wall. The smell of soap was insufferable, and hot noises came up irritatingly from the street. He looked at his watch: it was just four o'clock.

He wondered if Millicent had come in yet, and if she had read his letter. The occupation of picturing how she would feel when she read it proved less exhilarating than he had expected, and he got up and wandered about the room. He opened a drawer in the dressing-table, and seeing in it some burnt matches and a fuzz of hair, shut it with disgust; but just as he was ringing to rebuke the house-maid he remembered that he was not in his own house. He sat down again, wondering if the afternoon post were in, and what letters it had brought. It was annoying not to get his letters. What would be done about them? Would they be sent after him? Sent where? It suddenly occurred to him that he didn't in the least know where he was going. He must be going somewhere, of course; he hadn't left home to settle down in that stifling room. He supposed he should go to town, but with the heat at ninety the prospect was not alluring. He might decide on Lenox or Saratoga; but a doubt as to the propriety of such a course set him once more adrift on a chartless sea of perplexities. His head ached horribly and he threw himself on the bed.

When he sat up, worn out with his thoughts, the room was growing dark. Eight o'clock! Millicent must be dressing — but no; to-night at least, he grimly reflected, she was condemned to the hateful necessity of dining alone; unless, indeed, her audacity sent her to Mrs. Targe's in the always-acceptable role of the pretty woman whose husband has been "called away." Perhaps Antrim would be asked to fill his place!

The thought flung him on his feet, but its impetus carried him no farther. He was borne down by the physical apathy of a traveller who has a week's journey in his bones. He sat down and thought of the little girls, who were just going to bed. They would have welcomed him at that hour: he was aware that they cherished him chiefly as a pretext, a sanctuary from bed-time and lessons. He had never in his life been more than an alternative to anyone.

A vague sense of physical apprehension resolved itself into hunger stripped of appetite, and he decided that he ought to urge himself to eat. He opened his door on a rising aroma of stale coffee and fry.

In the dining-room, where a waiter offered him undefinable food in thick-lipped saucers, Mr. Mindon decided to go to New York. Retreating from the heavy assault of a wedge of pie, he pushed back his chair and went upstairs. He felt hot and grimy in the yachting-clothes he had worn since morning, and the Fall River boat would at least be cool. Then he remembered the playful throngs that held the deck, the midnight hilarity of the waltz-tunes, the horror of the morning coffee. His stomach was still tremulous from its late adventure into the unknown, and he shrank from further risks. He had never before realized how much he loved his home.

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He grew soft at the vision of his vacant chair. What were they doing and saying without him? His little ones were fatherless — and Millicent? Hitherto he had evaded the thought of Millicent, but now he took a doleful pleasure in picturing her in ruins at his feet. Involuntarily he found himself stooping to her despair; but he straightened himself and said aloud, "I'll take the night-train, then." The sound of his voice surprised him, and he started up. Was that a footstep outside? — a message, a note? Had they found out where he was, and was his wretched wife mad enough to sue for mercy? His ironical smile gave the measure of her madness; but the step passed on, and he sat down rather blankly. The impressiveness of his attitude was being gradually sapped by the sense that no one knew where he was. He had reached the point where he could not be sure of remaining inflexible unless someone asked him to relent.

IV.

AT the sound of a knock he clutched his hat and bag.

"Mindon, I say!" a genial voice adjured him; and before he could take counsel with his newly acquired dignity, which did not immediately respond to a first summons, the door opened on the reassuring presence of Laurence Meysy.

Mr. Mindon felt the relief of a sufferer at the approach of the eminent specialist. Laurence Meysy was the past tense of a dangerous man: though time-worn, still a favorite; a circulating-library romance, dog-eared by many a lovely hand, and still perused with pleasure, though, alas! no longer on the sly. He was said to have wrought much havoc in his youth; and it being now his innocent pleasure to repair the damage done by others, he had become the consulting physician of injured husbands and imprudent wives.

Two gentlemen followed him: Mr. Mindon's uncle and senior partner, the eminent Ezra Brownrigg, and the Reverend Doctor Bonifant, rector of the New York church in which Mr. Mindon owned a pew that was almost as expensive as his opera-box.

Mr. Brownrigg entered silently: to get at anything to say he had to sink an artesian well of meditation; but he always left people impressed by what he would have said if he had spoken. He greeted his nephew with the air of a distinguished mourner at a funeral — the mourner who consciously overshadows the corpse; and Doctor Bonifant did justice to the emotional side of the situation by fervently exclaiming, "Thank Heaven, we are not too late!"

Mr. Mindon looked about him with pardonable pride. The scene suggested something between a vestry-meeting and a conference of railway-directors; and the knowledge that he himself was its central figure, that even his uncle was an accessory, an incident, a mere bit of still-life brushed in by the artist Circumstance to throw Mr. Mindon into fuller prominence, gave that gentleman his first sense of equality with his wife. Equality? In another moment he towered above her, picturing her in an attitude of vaguely imagined penance at Doctor Bonifant's feet. Mr. Mindon had always felt about the clergy much as he did about his library: he had never quite known what they were for; but, with the pleased surprise of the pious naturalist, he now saw that they had their uses, like every other object in the economy of nature.

"My dear fellow," Meysy persuasively went on, "we've come to have a little chat with you."

Mr. Brownrigg and the Rector seated themselves. Mr. Mindon mechanically followed their example, and Meysy, asking the others if they minded his cigarette, cheerfully accommodated himself to the edge of the bed.

From the life-long habit of taking the chair, Mr. Brownrigg coughed and looked at Doctor Bonifant. The Rector leaned forward, stroking his cheek with a hand on which a massive intaglio seemed to be rehearsing the part of the episcopal ring; then his deprecating glance transferred the burden of action to Laurence Meysy. Meysy seemed to be surveying the case through the mitigating medium of cigarette-smoke. His view was that of the professional setting to rights the blunders of two amateurs. It was his theory that the art of carrying on a love affair was very nearly extinct; and he had a far greater contempt for Antrim than for Mr. Mindon.

"My dear fellow," he began, "I've seen Mrs. Mindon — she sent for me."

Mr. Brownrigg, peering between guarded lids, here interposed a "Very proper."

Of course Millicent had done the proper thing! Mr. Mindon could not repress a thrill of pride at her efficiency.

"Mrs. Mindon," Meysy continued, "showed me your letter." He paused. "She was perfectly frank — she throws herself on your mercy."

"That should be remembered in her favor," Doctor Bonifant murmured in a voice of absolution.

"It's a wretched business, Mindon — the poor woman's crushed — crushed. Your uncle here has seen her."

Mr. Brownrigg glanced suspiciously at Meysy, as though not certain whether he cared to corroborate an unauthorized assertion; then he said, "Mrs. Brownrigg has not."

Doctor Bonifant sighed: Mrs. Brownrigg was one of his most cherished parishioners.

"And the long and short of it is," Meysy summed up, "that we're here as your friends — and as your wife's friends — to ask you what you mean to do."

There was a pause. Mr. Mindon was disturbed by finding the initiative shifted to his shoulders. He had been

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talking to himself so volubly for the last six hours that he seemed to have nothing left to say.

"To do — to do?" he stammered. "Why, I mean to go away — leave her — "

"Divorce her?"

"Why, — y—yes — yes — "

Doctor Bonifant sighed again, and Mr. Brownrigg's lips stirred like a door being cautiously unbarred.

Meusy knocked the ashes off his cigarette. "You've quite made up your mind, eh?"

Mr. Mindon faltered another assent. Then, annoyed at the uncertain sound of his voice, he repeated loudly, "I mean to divorce her."

The repetition fortified his resolve; and his declaration seemed to himself against entreaty: their mere presence was a pedestal for his wrongs. The words flocked of themselves, building up his conviction like a throng of masons buttressing a weak wall.

Mr. Brownrigg spoke upon his first pause. "There's the publicity — it's the kind of thing that's prejudicial to a man's business interests.

An hour earlier the words would have turned Mr. Mindon cold; now he brushed them aside. His business interests, forsooth! What good had his money ever done him? What chance had he ever had of enjoying it? All his toil hadn't made him a rich man — it had merely made Millicent a rich woman.

Doctor Bonifant murmured, "The children must be considered."

"They've never considered me!" Mr. Mindon retorted — and turned afresh upon his uncle. Mr. Brownrigg listened impassively. He was a very silent man, but his silence was not a receptacle for the speech of others — it was a hard convex surface on which argument found no footing. Mr. Mindon reverted to the Rector. Doctor Bonifant's attitude towards life was full of a benignant receptivity; as though, logically, a man who had accepted the Thirty-nine Articles was justified in accepting anything else that he chose. His attention had therefore an absorbent quality peculiarly encouraging to those who addressed him. He listened affirmatively, as it were.

Mr. Mindon's spirits rose. It was the first time that he had ever had an audience. He dragged his hearers over every stage of his wrongs, losing sight of the vital injury in the enumeration of incidental grievances. He had the excited sense that at last Millicent would know what he had always thought of her.

Mr. Brownrigg looked at his watch, and Doctor Bonifant bent his head as though under the weight of a pulpit peroration. Meusy, from the bed, watched the three men with the air of an expert who holds the solution of the problem.

He slipped to his feet as Mr. Mindon's speech flagged.

"I suppose you've considered, Mindon, that it rests with you to proclaim the fact that you're no longer — well, the chief object of your wife's affection?"

Mr. Mindon raised his head irritably; interrogation impeded the flow of his diatribe.

"That you — er — in short, create the situation by making it known?" Meusy glanced at the Rector. "Am I right, Bonifant?"

The Rector took meditative counsel of his finger-tips; then slowly, as though formulating a dogma, "Under certain conditions," he conceded, "what is unknown may be said to be non-existent."

Mr. Mindon looked from one to the other.

"Damn it, man — before it's too late," Meusy followed up, "can't you see that you're the only person who can make you ridiculous?"

Mr. Brownrigg rose, and Mr. Mindon had the desperate sense that the situation was slipping out of his grasp.

"It rests with you," Doctor Bonifant murmured, "to save your children from even the shadow of obloquy."

"You can't stay here, at any rate," said Mr. Brownrigg heavily.

Mr. Mindon, who had risen, dropped weakly into his chair. His three counsellors were now all on their feet, taking up their hats with the air of men who have touched the limit of duty. In another moment they would be gone, and with them Mr. Mindon's audience, his support, his confidence in the immutability of his resolve. He felt himself no more than an evocation of their presence; and, in dread of losing the identity they had created, he groped for a detaining word. "I sha'n't leave for New York till to-morrow."

"To-morrow everything will be known," said Mr. Brownrigg, with his hand on the door.

Meusy glanced at his watch with a faint smile. "It's to-morrow now," he added.

He fell back, letting the older men pass out; but, turning as though to follow, he felt a drowning clutch upon

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his arm.

"It's for the children," Mr. Mindon stammered.