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Theodore Dreiser
**SHORT
STORIES**

UNABRIDGED

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Short Stories

THEODORE DREISER



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Note

THEODORE DREISER (1871–1945) was one of ten children, the son of a stern German Catholic father and a sympathetic mother. At a very early age Dreiser experienced severe poverty; his childhood was punctuated by frequent moves throughout the Midwest as his family searched for work and adequate housing. Such early hardships so impressed Dreiser that a keen sense of social oppression and injustice informs all his writing.

Dreiser began his literary career—after a year at the University of Indiana, subsidized by a former high school teacher—as a journalist, working for newspapers in Chicago, St. Louis, Pittsburgh and finally New York. In 1894 he began writing magazine articles, and in 1900 one of his most famous novels, *Sister Carrie*, was published. The novel came under attack for immorality—its “sinful” heroine goes unpunished for her transgressions—and sold only 456 copies. Other writers, however, such as Frank Norris, H. G. Wells and Sherwood Anderson, praised Dreiser’s work for its unflinching naturalism. By the time Dreiser published *Free and Other Stories* in 1918, such naturalism was more acceptable to the American public, and Dreiser’s ability to portray a range of human emotions with compassion and dignity was better appreciated. In the five stories included here, Dreiser pits his characters against social forces that stifle and oppress. In “Free” a man realizes, on the eve of his wife’s death, the depth of his sacrifices for the sake of convention. In “The Second Choice” a young working-class woman is faced with the drab and inevitable reality of her future. In “Nigger Jeff” a young reporter witnesses the lynching of a black man. Though Dreiser’s portrayal of the lynched man may appear offensive to modern readers, his depiction of the tragedy reveals his insight into human motivations, for good and bad. Together these stories represent Dreiser’s commitment to realism, to what Sherwood Anderson described as “greater courage and fidelity to life in writing.”

Introduction¹

THEODORE DREISER is a man who, with the passage of time, is bound to loom larger and larger in the awakening æsthetic consciousness of America. Among all of our prose writers he is one of the few men of whom it may be said that he has always been an honest workman, always impersonal, never a trickster. Read this book of Dreiser's, *Free and Other Stories*, and then compare it with a book of short stories, say by Bret Harte or O. Henry. The tradition of trick writing began early among us in America and has flowered here like some strange fungus growth. Every one knows there are no plot short stories in life itself and yet the tradition of American short story writing has been built almost entirely upon the plot idea. Human nature, the strange little whims, tragedies and comedies of life itself, have everywhere been sacrificed to the need of plot and one reads the ordinary plot story of the magazines with a kind of growing wonder. "Is there no comedy, no tragedy, no irony in life itself? If it is there why do not our writers find it out and set it forth? Why these everlasting falsehoods, this ever-present bag of tricks?"

One is sometimes convinced, in thinking of the matter, that, among most of our prose writers, there is left no feeling at all for life, and the prose writer, at least the tale teller, who has no feeling for life is no artist. There is the man or woman who walks beside me in the street, works beside me in the office, sits beside me in the theatre. What has happened in the lives of all these people? Why do our writers so determinedly spend all their time inventing people who never had any existence — puppets — these impossible cowboys, detectives, society adventurers? Are most of our successful short story writers too lazy to find out something about life itself, the occasional flashes of wonder and

1. This introduction appears in the 1918 Modern Library edition by Boni and Liveright, Inc., New York.

strangeness in life? It is apparent they are. Either they are too lazy or they are afraid of life, tremble before it.

But Theodore Dreiser is not afraid. He does not tremble. Often I have thought of him as the bravest man who has lived in America in our times. Perhaps I exaggerate. He is a man of my own craft and always he has been a heroic figure in my own eyes. He is honest. Never in any line he has ever written will you find him resorting to the trick to get himself out of a hard situation. The beauty and the ironic terror of life is like a wall before him but he faces the wall. He does not mutter cheap little lies in the darkness and to me there is something honorable and fine in the fact that in him there is no lack of courage in facing his materials, that he needs resort to tricks of style to cover.

Dreiser is a middle-westerner, large of frame, rather shy, brusque in manner and in his person singularly free from the common small vanities of the artist class. I often wonder if he knows how much he is loved and respected for what he has done by hundreds of unknown writers everywhere, fellows just trying to get ground under their feet. If there is a modern movement in American prose writing, a movement toward greater courage and fidelity to life in writing, then Theodore Dreiser is the pioneer and the hero of the movement. Of that I think there can be no question. I think it is true now that no American prose writer need hesitate before the task of putting his hands upon his materials. Puritanism, as a choking, smothering force, is dead or dying. We are rapidly approaching the old French standard wherein the only immorality for the artist is in bad art and I think that Theodore Dreiser, the man, has done more than any living American to bring this about. All honor to him. The whole air of America is sweeter to breathe because he had lived and worked here. He has laid a foundation upon which any sort of structure may be built. It will stand the strain. His work has been honestly and finely done. The man has laid so many old ghosts, pounded his way through such a wall of stupid prejudices and fears that today any man coming into the craft of writing comes with a new inheritance of freedom.

In the middle-western country in which Dreiser grew to manhood there could have been no awareness of the artist's obligations. How his own feet found the path they have followed so consistently I do not know. One gets so little from his own writings, from those little flashes by which every artist reveals himself in his work, that helps toward an understanding of his fine courage. Grey smoky hurried towns, Terre Haute, Indiana, Chicago, St. Louis, and the other places wherein he worked and lived, a life of hard work for small pay in dreary places. Twain had at least the rough and tumble heartiness of western life, the

romance of the old Mississippi river days, and as for the eastern men who came before Dreiser, the Hawthornes, Emersons (and one is compelled to include the Howellses) they grew out of a European culture, were the children of a European culture, a fact that no doubt advantaged them while it has been of so little help to the Americans who are seeking masters to aid them in finding a life and a basis for a culture of their own.

Our earlier New England writers knew Europe and Europe knew them and accepted them as distant cousins anyway, but in Terre Haute, Indiana, in Dreiser's day there, when his own life was forming — if any of his fellow countrymen of that day and place ever crossed the sea I dare say they went to the Holy Land and came back with a bottle of Jordan Water. The only knowledge they had of the work and the aims of European artists was got from reading that most vulgar of all our Mark Twain's books, *The Innocents Abroad*. The idea of an artist, with all of the strange tangle of dreams and hopes in his brain being also a workman, owing something to his craft and to the materials of his craft, would have been as strange to the Terre Haute or the St. Louis of twenty-five years ago as a camel sitting and smoking a pipe on the court-house steps.

And it was out of such a grey blankness (from the artist's point of view, at least) that the man Dreiser came and he came alone, making his own path. What a figure he has made of himself, always pounding at the wall of stupidity before him, throwing aside always the cheap triumph to be got by trickery, always giving himself fully and honestly to the life about him, trying to understand it, never lying to himself or to others. One thinks of such a life and is appalled.

There is that story we have all heard of the young Dostoevsky, when he had written his first book, *Poor Folks*. He gave the manuscript to a writer friend who took it home and read it and in the middle of the night drove to the home of a publisher, filled with excitement. The two men sat up together and read the manuscript aloud and then, although it was four in the morning drove through the wintry streets to the young writer's lodgings. There was joy, excitement, happy fellow craftsmen, even tears of joy. A new and great writer had come into Russian life. What glad recognition. It was like a wedding or a birth. Men were happy together and you may imagine how the young craftsman felt.

That happened in Russia and in America Dreiser wrote his *Sister Carrie* and it was published and later buried out of sight in the cellar of a publishing house, for some ten years I believe, and might have been there yet but for the fighting impulses of our critics, our Hacketts, Menckens and Dells. Some woman, a relative perhaps of some member

of the publishing firm, had decided the book was immoral and today one reads with wonder, seeking in vain for the immorality and only made glad by its sympathetic understanding of life.

Theodore Dreiser, whose book *Free and Other Stories* is now included in the famous Modern Library series, has lived out most of his life as a comparatively poor man. He might have grown rich had he but joined the ranks of the clever tricksters or had he devoted his energies to turning out romantic sentimentalities. What amusing and clever men we have had in his time, what funny fellows, what masters of all the tricks of writing.

Where are they? What have they given us?

And what has Dreiser given us? A fine growing and glowing tradition, has he not, a new sense of the value of our own lives, a new interest in the life about us, in offices, streets and houses.

Theodore Dreiser's nature is the true artist's nature, so little understood among us. He is no reformer. In his work, as in the man himself, there is something bold, with all the health of true boldness, and at the same time something very finely humble. He stands before life, looking at it, trying to understand it that he may catch its significance and its drama. He is not always crying, "Look at me! See what I am doing!" He is the workman, full of self-respect, and — most strange and wonderful of all for an American writer — full of respect for his materials, for the lives of those who come close to him, for that world of people who have come into life under his pen.

As for my trying to make in any detailed way an estimate of the value of the man's work, that is beyond me. The man has done, is doing, his job, he has fought his way through darkness into the light and in making a pathway for himself he has made a pathway for us all. Because he had lived and worked so honestly and finely America is a better place for all workmen. As for his work, there it stands — sturdy, strong, true and fine and most of all free from all the many cheap tricks of our craft.

And as for the man himself, there he also stands. One knows Dreiser will never stoop to tricky, second rate work; cannot, being Dreiser, ever so stoop. He is, however, not given to advertising himself. He stays in the background and lets the work speak for the man. It is the kind of fine, honest work that is coming to mean more and more every year to a growing army of sincere American craftsmen.

SHERWOOD ANDERSON

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Free¹

THE LARGE and rather comfortable apartment of Rufus Haymaker, architect, in Central Park West, was very silent. It was scarcely dawn yet, and at the edge of the park, over the way, looking out from the front windows which graced this abode and gave it its charm, a stately line of poplars was still shrouded in a gray morning mist. From his bedroom at one end of the hall, where, also, a glimpse of the park was to be had, came Mr. Haymaker at this early hour to sit by one of these broader windows and contemplate these trees and a small lake beyond. He was very fond of Nature in its manifold art forms — quite poetic, in fact.

He was a tall and spare man of about sixty, not ungraceful, though slightly stoop-shouldered, with heavy overhanging eyebrows and hair, and a short, professionally cut gray mustache and beard, which gave him a severe and yet agreeable presence. For the present he was clad in a light-blue dressing gown with silver cords, which enveloped him completely. He had thin, pale, long-fingered hands, wrinkled at the back and slightly knotted at the joints, which bespoke the artist, in mood at least, and his eyes had a weary and yet restless look in them.

For only yesterday Doctor Storm, the family physician, who was in attendance on his wife, ill now for these three weeks past with a combination of heart lesion, kidney poisoning and neuritis, had taken him aside and said very softly and affectionately, as though he were trying to spare his feelings: "To-morrow, Mr. Haymaker, if your wife is no better I will call in my friend, Doctor Grainger, whom you know, for a consultation. He is more of an expert in these matters of the heart" — the heart, Mr. Haymaker had time to note ironically — "than I am. Together we will make a thorough examination, and then I hope we will be better able to say what the possibilities of her recovery really are. It's been a very trying case, a very stubborn one, I might say. Still, she has a great deal of vitality and is doing as well as could be expected, all things considered.

1. "Free" first appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post*, March 16, 1918.

At the same time, though I don't wish to alarm you unnecessarily — and there is no occasion for great alarm yet — still I feel it my duty to warn you that her condition is very serious indeed. Not that I wish you to feel that she is certain to die. I don't think she is. Not at all. Just the contrary. She may get well, and probably will, and live all of twenty years more." (Mentally Mr. Haymaker sighed a purely spiritual sigh.) "She has fine recuperative powers, so far as I can judge, but she has a bad heart, and this kidney trouble has not helped it any. Just now, when her heart should have the least strain, it has the most.

"She is just at that point where, as I may say, things are in the balance. A day or two, or three or four at the most, ought to show which way things will go. But, as I have said before, I do not wish to alarm you unnecessarily. We are not nearly at the end of our tether. We haven't tried blood transfusion yet, and there are several arrows to that bow. Besides, at any moment she may respond more vigorously to medication than she has heretofore — especially in connection with her kidneys. In that case the situation would be greatly relieved at once.

"However, as I say, I feel it my duty to speak to you in this way in order that you may be mentally prepared for any event, because in such an odd combination as this the worst may happen at any time. We never can tell. As an old friend of yours and Mrs. Haymaker's, and knowing how much you two mean to each other" — Mr. Haymaker merely stared at him vacantly — "I feel it my duty to prepare you in this way. We all of us have to face these things. Only last year I lost my dear Matilda, my youngest child, as you know. Just the same, as I say, I have the feeling that Mrs. Haymaker is not really likely to die soon, and that we — Doctor Grainger and myself — will still be able to pull her through. I really do."

Doctor Storm looked at Mr. Haymaker as though he were very sorry for him — an old man long accustomed to his wife's ways and likely to be made very unhappy by her untimely end; whereas Mr. Haymaker, though staring in an almost sculptural way, was really thinking what a farce it all was, what a dull mixture of error and illusion on the part of all. Here he was, sixty years of age, weary of all this, of life really — a man who had never been really happy in all the time that he had been married; and yet here was his wife, who from conventional reasons believed that he was or should be, and who on account of this was serenely happy herself, or nearly so. And this doctor, who imagined that he was old and weak and therefore in need of this loving woman's care and sympathy and understanding! Unconsciously he raised a deprecating hand.

Also his children, who thought him dependent on her and happy with her; his servants and her and his friends thinking the same thing,

and yet he really was not. It was all a lie. He was unhappy. Always he had been unhappy, it seemed, ever since he had been married — for over thirty-one years now. Never in all that time, for even so much as a single day, had he ever done anything but long, long, long, in a pale, constrained way — for what, he scarcely dared think — not to be married any more — to be free — to be as he was before ever he saw Mrs. Haymaker.

And yet being conventional in mood and training and utterly domesticated by time and conditions over which he seemed not to have much control — nature, custom, public opinion, and the like, coming into play as forces — he had drifted, had not taken any drastic action. No, he had merely drifted, wondering if time, accident or something might not interfere and straighten out his life for him, but it never had. Now weary, old, or rapidly becoming so, he condemned himself for his inaction. Why hadn't he done something about it years before? Why hadn't he broken it up before it was too late, and saved his own soul, his longing for life, color? But no, he had not. Why complain so bitterly now?

All the time the doctor had talked this day before he had wanted to smile a wry, dry, cynical smile, for in reality he did not want Mrs. Haymaker to live — or at least at the moment he thought so. He was too miserably tired of it all. And so now, after nearly twenty-four hours of the same unhappy thought, sitting by this window looking at a not distant building which shone faintly in the haze, he ran his fingers through his hair as he gazed, and sighed.

How often in these weary months, and even years, past — ever since he and his wife had been living here, and before — had he come to these or similar windows while she was still asleep, to sit and dream! For some years now they had not even roomed together, so indifferent had the whole state become; though she did not seem to consider that significant, either. Life had become more or less of a practical problem to her, one of position, place, prestige. And yet how often, viewing his life in retrospect, had he wished that his life had been as sweet as his dreams — that his dreams had come true.

After a time on this early morning, for it was still gray, with the faintest touch of pink in the east, he shook his head solemnly and sadly, then rose and returned along the hall to his wife's bedroom, at the door of which he paused to look where she lay seriously ill, and beside her in an armchair, fast asleep, a trained nurse who was supposedly keeping the night vigil ordered by the doctor, but who no doubt was now very weary. His wife was sleeping also — very pale, very thin now, and very weak. He felt sorry for her at times, in spite of his own weariness; now, for instance. Why need he have made so great a mistake so long ago? Perhaps it was

his own fault for not having been wiser in his youth. Then he went quietly on to his own room, to lie down and think.

Always these days, now that she was so very ill and the problem of her living was so very acute, the creeping dawn thus roused him — to think. It seemed as though he could not really sleep soundly any more, so stirred and distrait was he. He was not so much tired or physically worn as mentally bored or disappointed. Life had treated him so badly, he kept thinking to himself over and over. He had never had the woman he really wanted, though he had been married so long, had been faithful, respectable and loved by her, in her way. "In her way," he half quoted to himself as he lay there.

Presently he would get up, dress and go down to his office as usual if his wife were not worse. But — but, he asked himself — would she be? Would that slim and yet so durable organism of hers — quite as old as his own, or nearly so — break under the strain of this really severe illness? That would set him free again, and nicely, without blame or comment on him. He could then go where he chose once more, do as he pleased — think of that — without let or hindrance. For she was ill at last, so very ill, the first and really great illness she had endured since their marriage. For weeks now she had been lying so, hovering, as it were, between life and death, one day better, the next day worse, and yet not dying, and with no certainty that she would, and yet not getting better either. Doctor Storm insisted that it was a leak in her heart which had suddenly manifested itself which was causing all the real trouble. He was apparently greatly troubled as to how to control it.

During all this period Mr. Haymaker had been, as usual, most sympathetic. His manner toward her was always soft, kindly, apparently tender. He had never really begrudged her anything — nothing certainly that he could afford. He was always glad to see her and the children humanly happy — though they, too, largely on account of her, he thought, had proved a disappointment to him — because he had always sympathized with her somewhat unhappy youth, narrow and stinted; and yet he had never been happy himself, either, never in all the time that he had been married. If she had endured much, he kept telling himself when he was most unhappy, so had he, only it was harder perhaps for women to endure things than men — he was always willing to admit that — only also she had had his love, or thought she had, an actual spiritual peace, which he had never had. She knew she had a faithful husband. He felt that he had never really had a wife at all, not one that he could love as he knew a wife should be loved. His dreams as to that!

Going to his office later this same day — it was in one of those tall buildings that face Madison Square — he had looked first, in passing, at

the trees that line Central Park West, and then at the bright wall of apartment houses facing it, and meditated sadly, heavily. Here the sidewalks were crowded with nursemaids and children at play, and in between them, of course, the occasional citizen loitering or going about his errands. The day was so fine, so youthful, as spring days will seem at times. As he looked, especially at the children, and the young men bustling office-ward, mostly in new spring suits, he sighed and wished that he were young once more. Think how brisk and hopeful they were! Everything was before them. They could still pick and choose — no age or established conditions to stay them. Were any of them, he asked himself for the thousandth time, it seemed to him, as wearily connected as he had been at their age? Did they each have a charming young wife to love — one of whom they were passionately fond — such a one as he had never had; or did they not?

Wondering, he reached his office on one of the topmost floors of one of those highest buildings commanding a wide view of the city, and surveyed it wearily. Here were visible the two great rivers of the city, its towers and spires and far-flung walls. From these sometimes, even yet, he seemed to gain a patience to live, to hope. How in his youth all this had inspired him — or that other city that was then. Even now he was always at peace here, so much more so than in his own home, pleasant as it was. Here he could look out over this great scene and dream or he could lose the memory in his work that his love-life had been a failure. The great city, the buildings he could plan or supervise, the efficient help that always surrounded him — his help, not hers — aided to take his mind off himself and that deep-seated inner ache or loss.

The care of Mr. Haymaker's apartment during his wife's illness and his present absence throughout the day, devolved upon a middle-aged woman of great seriousness, Mrs. Elfridge by name, whom Mrs. Haymaker had employed years before; and under her a maid of all work, Hester, who waited on table, opened the door, and the like; and also at present two trained nurses, one for night and one for day service, who were in charge of Mrs. Haymaker. The nurses were both bright, healthy, blue-eyed girls, who attracted Mr. Haymaker and suggested all the youth he had never had — without really disturbing his poise. It would seem as though that could never be any more.

In addition, of course, there was the loving interest of his son Wesley and his daughter Ethelberta — whom his wife had named so in spite of him — both of whom had long since married and had children of their own and were living in different parts of the great city. In this crisis both of them came daily to learn how things were, and occasionally to stay for the entire afternoon or evening, or both. Ethelberta had wanted to come

and take charge of the apartment entirely during her mother's illness, only Mrs. Haymaker, who was still able to direct, and fond of doing so, would not hear of it. She was not so ill but that she could still speak, and in this way could inquire and direct. Besides, Mrs. Elfridge was as good as Mrs. Haymaker in all things that related to Mr. Haymaker's physical comfort, or so she thought.

If the truth will come out — as it will in so many pathetic cases — it was never his physical so much as his spiritual or affectional comfort that Mr. Haymaker craved. As said before, he had never loved Mrs. Haymaker, or certainly not since that now long-distant period back in Muskegon, Michigan, where both had been born and where they had lived and met at the ages, she of fifteen, he of seventeen. It had been, strange as it might seem now, a love match at first sight with them. She had seemed so sweet, a girl of his own age or a little younger, the daughter of a local chemist. Later, when he had been forced by poverty to go out into the world to make his own way, he had written her much, and imagined her to be all that she had seemed at fifteen, and more — a dream among fair women. But Fortune, slow in coming to his aid and fickle in fulfilling his dreams, had brought it about that for several years more he had been compelled to stay away nearly all of the time, unable to marry her; during which period, unknown to himself really, his own point of view had altered. How it had happened he could never tell really, but so it was. The great city, larger experiences — while she was still enduring the smaller ones — other faces, dreams of larger things, had all combined to destroy it or her, only he had not quite realized it then. He was always so slow in realizing the full import of the immediate thing, he thought.

That was the time, as he had afterward told himself — how often! — that he should have discovered his mistake and stopped. Later it always seemed to become more and more impossible. Then, in spite of some heartache to her and some distress to himself, no doubt, all would be well for him now. But no; he had been too inexperienced, too ignorant, too bound by all the conventions and punctilio of his simple Western world. He thought an engagement, however unsatisfactory it might come to seem afterward, was an engagement, and binding. An honorable man would not break one — or so his country moralists argued.

Yes, at that time he might have written her, he might have told her, then. But he had been too sensitive and kindly to speak of it. Afterward it was too late. He feared to wound her, to undo her, to undo her life. But now — now — look at his! He had gone back on several occasions before marriage, and might have seen and done and been free if he had had but courage and wisdom — but no; duty, order, the beliefs of the region in

which he had been reared, and of America — what it expected and what she expected and was entitled to — had done for him completely. He had not spoken. Instead, he had gone on and married her without speaking of the change in himself, without letting her know how worse than ashes it had all become. God, what a fool he had been! how often since he had told himself over and over.

Well, having made a mistake it was his duty perhaps, at least according to current beliefs, to stick by it and make the best of it; — a bargain was a bargain in marriage, if no where else — but still that had never prevented him from being unhappy. He could not prevent that himself. During all these long years, therefore, owing to these same conventions — what people would think and say — he had been compelled to live with her, to cherish her, to pretend to be happy with her — “another perfect union,” as he sometimes said to himself. In reality he had been unhappy, horribly so. Even her face wearied him at times, and her presence, her mannerisms. Only this other morning Doctor Storm, by his manner indicating that he thought him lonely, in danger of being left all alone and desperately sad and neglected in case she died had irritated him greatly. Who would take care of him? his eyes had seemed to say — and yet he himself wanted nothing so much as to be alone for a time, at least, in this life, to think for himself, to do for himself, to forget this long, dreary period in which he had pretended to be something that he was not.

Was he never to be rid of the dull round of it, he asked himself now, never before he himself died? And yet shortly afterward he would reproach himself for these very thoughts, as being wrong, hard, unkind — thoughts that would certainly condemn him in the eyes of the general public, that public which made reputations and one's general standing before the world.

During all this time he had never even let her know — no, not once — of the tremendous and soul-crushing sacrifice he had made. Like the Spartan boy, he had concealed the fox gnawing at his vitals. He had not complained. He had been, indeed, the model husband, as such things go in conventional walks. If you doubted it look at his position, or that of his children; or his wife — her mental and physical comfort, even in her illness, her unflinching belief that he was all he should be! Never once apparently, during all these years, had she doubted his love or felt him to be unduly unhappy — or, if not that exactly, if not fully accepting his love as something that was still at a fever heat, the thing it once was — still believing that he found pleasure and happiness in being with her, a part of the home which together they had built up, these children they had reared, comfort in knowing that it would endure to the end! To the

end! During all these years she had gone on molding his and her lives — as much as that was possible in his case — and those of their children, to suit herself; and thinking all the time that she was doing what he wanted or at least what was best for him and them.

How she adored convention! What did she not think she knew in regard to how things ought to be — mainly what her old home surroundings had taught her, the American idea of this, that and the other. Her theories in regard to friends, education of the children, and so on, had in the main prevailed, even when he did not quite agree with her; her desires for certain types of pleasure and amusement, of companionship, and so on, were conventional types always and had also prevailed. There had been little quarrels, of course, always had been — what happy home is free of them? — but still he had always given in, or nearly always, and had acted as though he were satisfied in so doing.

But why, therefore, should he complain now, or she ever imagine, or ever have imagined, that he was unhappy? She did not, had not. Like all their relatives and friends of the region from which they sprang, and here also — and she had been most careful to regulate that, courting whom she pleased and ignoring all others — she still believed most firmly, more so than ever, that she knew what was best for him, what he really thought and wanted. It made him smile most wearily at times.

For in her eyes — in regard to him, at least, not always so with others, he had found — marriage was a sacrament, sacrosanct, never to be dissolved. One life, one love. Once a man had accepted the yoke or even asked a girl to marry him it was his duty to abide by it. To break an engagement, to be unfaithful to a wife, even unkind to her — what a crime, in her eyes! Such people ought to be drummed out of the world. They were really not fit to live — dogs, brutes!

And yet, look at himself — what of him? What of one who had made a mistake in regard to all this? Where was his compensation to come from, his peace and happiness? Here on earth or only in some mythical heaven — that odd, angelic heaven that she still believed in? What a farce! And all her friends and his would think he would be so miserable now if she died, or at least ought to be. So far had asinine convention and belief in custom carried the world. Think of it!

But even that was not the worst. No; that was not the worst, either. It had been the gradual realization coming along through the years that he had married an essentially small, narrow woman who could never really grasp his point of view — or, rather, the significance of his dreams or emotions — and yet with whom, nevertheless, because of this original promise or mistake, he was compelled to live. Grant her every quality of goodness, energy, industry, intent — as he did freely — still there was this;