

FICTION

Henry James

Madame De Mauves

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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MADAME DE MAUVES

By Henry James

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I

The view from the terrace at Saint-Germain-en-Laye is immense and famous. Paris lies spread before you in dusky vastness, domed and fortified, glittering here and there through her light vapours and girdled with her silver Seine. Behind you is a park of stately symmetry, and behind that a forest where you may lounge through turfy avenues and light-chequered glades and quite forget that you are within half an hour of the boulevards. One afternoon, however, in mid-spring, some five years ago, a young man seated on the terrace had preferred to keep this in mind. His eyes were fixed in idle wistfulness on the mighty human hive before him. He was fond of rural things, and he had come to Saint-Germain a week before to meet the spring halfway; but though he could boast of a six months' acquaintance with the great city he never looked at it from his present vantage without a sense of curiosity still unappeased. There were moments when it seemed to him that not to be there just then was to miss some thrilling chapter of experience. And yet his winter's experience had been rather fruitless and he had closed the book almost with a yawn. Though not in the least a cynic he was what one may call a disappointed observer, and he never chose the right-hand road without beginning to suspect after an hour's wayfaring that the left would have been the better. He now had a dozen minds to go to Paris for the evening, to dine at the Cafe Brebant and repair afterwards to the Gymnase and listen to the latest exposition of the duties of the injured husband. He would probably have risen to execute this project if he had not noticed a little girl who, wandering along the terrace, had suddenly stopped short and begun to gaze at him with round-eyed frankness. For a moment he was simply amused, the child's face denoting such helpless wonderment; the next he was agreeably surprised. "Why this is my friend Maggie," he said; "I see you've not forgotten me."

Maggie, after a short parley, was induced to seal her remembrance with a kiss. Invited then to explain her appearance at Saint-Germain, she embarked on a recital in which the general, according to the infantine method, was so fatally sacrificed to the particular that Longmore looked about him for a superior source of information. He found it in Maggie's mamma, who was seated with another lady at the opposite end of the terrace; so, taking the child by the

hand, he led her back to her companions.

Maggie's mamma was a young American lady, as you would immediately have perceived, with a pretty and friendly face and a great elegance of fresh finery. She greeted Longmore with amazement and joy, mentioning his name to her friend and bidding him bring a chair and sit with them. The other lady, in whom, though she was equally young and perhaps even prettier, muslins and laces and feathers were less of a feature, remained silent, stroking the hair of the little girl, whom she had drawn against her knee. She had never heard of Longmore, but she now took in that her companion had crossed the ocean with him, had met him afterwards in travelling and--having left her husband in Wall Street--was indebted to him for sundry services. Maggie's mamma turned from time to time and smiled at this lady with an air of invitation; the latter smiled back and continued gracefully to say nothing. For ten minutes, meanwhile, Longmore felt a revival of interest in his old acquaintance; then (as mild riddles are more amusing than mere commonplaces) it gave way to curiosity about her friend. His eyes wandered; her volubility shook a sort of sweetness out of the friend's silence.

The stranger was perhaps not obviously a beauty nor obviously an American, but essentially both for the really seeing eye. She was slight and fair and, though naturally pale, was delicately flushed just now, as by the effect of late agitation. What chiefly struck Longmore in her face was the union of a pair of beautifully gentle, almost languid grey eyes with a mouth that was all expression and intention. Her forehead was a trifle more expansive than belongs to classic types, and her thick brown hair dressed out of the fashion, just then even more ugly than usual. Her throat and bust were slender, but all the more in harmony with certain rapid charming movements of the head, which she had a way of throwing back every now and then with an air of attention and a sidelong glance from her dove-like eyes. She seemed at once alert and indifferent, contemplative and restless, and Longmore very soon discovered that if she was not a brilliant beauty she was at least a most attaching one. This very impression made him magnanimous. He was certain he had interrupted a confidential conversation, and judged it discreet to withdraw, having first learned from Maggie's mamma--Mrs. Draper--that she was to take the six o'clock train back to Paris. He promised to meet her at the station.

He kept his appointment, and Mrs. Draper arrived betimes, accompanied by her friend. The latter, however, made her farewells at the door and drove away again, giving Longmore time only to raise his hat. "Who is she?" he asked with visible ardour as he brought the traveller her tickets.

"Come and see me to-morrow at the Hotel de l'Empire," she answered, "and I'll tell you all about her." The force of this offer in making him punctual at the Hotel de l'Empire Longmore doubtless never exactly measured; and it was perhaps well he was vague, for he found his friend, who was on the point of leaving Paris, so distracted by procrastinating milliners and perjured lingers that coherence had quite deserted her. "You must find Saint-Germain dreadfully dull," she nevertheless had the presence of mind to say as he was going. "Why won't you come with me to London?"

"Introduce me to Madame de Mauves," he answered, "and Saint-Germain will quite satisfy me." All he had learned was the lady's name and residence.

"Ah she, poor woman, won't make your affair a carnival. She's very unhappy," said Mrs. Draper.

Longmore's further enquiries were arrested by the arrival of a young lady with a bandbox; but he went away with the promise of a note of introduction, to be immediately dispatched to him at Saint-Germain.

He then waited a week, but the note never came, and he felt how little it was for Mrs. Draper to complain of engagements unperformed. He lounged on the terrace and walked in the forest, studied suburban street life and made a languid attempt to investigate the records of the court of the exiled Stuarts; but he spent most of his time in wondering where Madame de Mauves lived and whether she ever walked on the terrace. Sometimes, he was at last able to recognise; for one afternoon toward dusk he made her out from a distance, arrested there alone and leaning against the low wall. In his momentary hesitation to approach her there was almost a shade of trepidation, but his curiosity was not chilled by such a measure of the effect of a quarter of an hour's acquaintance. She at once recovered their connexion, on his drawing near, and showed it with the frankness of a person unprovided with a great choice of contacts. Her dress, her expression, were the same as before; her charm came out like that of fine music on a second hearing. She soon made conversation easy by asking him for news of Mrs. Draper. Longmore told her that he was daily expecting news and after a pause mentioned the promised note of introduction.

"It seems less necessary now," he said--"for me at least. But for you--I should have liked you to know the good things our friend would probably have been able to say about me."

"If it arrives at last," she answered, "you must come and see me and bring it. If it doesn't you must come without it."

Then, as she continued to linger through the thickening twilight, she explained that she was waiting for her husband, who was to arrive in the train from Paris and who often passed along the terrace on his way home. Longmore well remembered that Mrs. Draper had spoken of uneasy things in her life, and he found it natural to guess that this same husband was the source of them. Edified by his six months in Paris, "What else is possible," he put it, "for a sweet American girl who marries an unholy foreigner?"

But this quiet dependence on her lord's return rather shook his shrewdness, and it received a further check from the free confidence with which she turned to greet an approaching figure. Longmore distinguished in the fading light a stoutish gentleman, on the fair side of forty, in a high grey hat, whose countenance, obscure as yet against the quarter from which it came, mainly presented to view the large outward twist of its moustache. M. de Mauves saluted his wife with punctilious gallantry and, having bowed to Longmore, asked her several questions in French. Before taking his offered arm to walk to their carriage, which was in waiting at the gate of the terrace, she introduced our hero as a friend of Mrs. Draper and also a fellow countryman, whom she hoped they might have the pleasure of seeing, as she said, chez eux. M. de Mauves responded briefly, but civilly, in fair English, and led his wife away.

Longmore watched him as he went, renewing the curl of his main facial feature--watched him with an irritation devoid of any mentionable ground. His one pretext for gnashing his teeth would have been in his apprehension that this gentleman's worst English might prove a matter to shame his own best French. For reasons involved apparently in the very structure of his being Longmore found a colloquial use of that idiom as insecure as the back of a restive horse, and was obliged to take his exercise, as he was aware, with more tension than grace. He reflected meanwhile with comfort that Madame de Mauves and he had a common tongue, and his anxiety yielded to his relief at finding on his table that evening a letter from Mrs. Draper. It enclosed a short formal missive to Madame de Mauves, but the epistle itself was copious and confidential. She had deferred writing till she reached London, where for a week, of course, she had found other amusements.

"I think it's the sight of so many women here who don't look at all like her that has reminded me by the law of contraries of my charming friend at Saint-Germain and my promise to introduce you to her," she wrote. "I believe I spoke to you of her rather blighted state, and I wondered afterwards whether I hadn't been guilty of a breach of confidence. But you would certainly have arrived at guesses of your own, and, besides, she has never told me her secrets. The only one she ever pretended to was that she's the happiest creature in the world, after assuring me of which, poor thing, she went off into tears; so that I prayed to be delivered from such happiness. It's the miserable story of an American girl born neither to submit basely nor to rebel crookedly marrying a shining sinful Frenchman who believes a woman must do one or the other of those things. The lightest of US have a ballast that they can't imagine, and the poorest a moral imagination that they don't require. She was romantic and perverse--she thought the world she had been brought up in too vulgar or at least too prosaic. To have a decent home-life isn't perhaps the greatest of adventures; but I think she wishes nowadays she hadn't gone in quite so desperately for thrills. M. de Mauves cared of course for nothing but her money, which he's spending royally on his menus plaisirs. I hope you appreciate the compliment I pay you when I recommend you to go and cheer up a lady domestically dejected. Believe me, I've given no other man a proof of this esteem; so if you were to take me in an inferior sense I would never speak to you again. Prove to this fine sore creature that our manners may have all the grace without wanting to make such selfish terms for it. She avoids society and lives quite alone, seeing no one but a horrible French sister-in-law. Do let me hear that you've made her patience a little less absent-minded. Make her WANT to forget; make her like you."

This ingenious appeal left the young man uneasy. He found himself in presence of more complications than had been in his reckoning. To call on Madame de Mauves with his present knowledge struck him as akin to fishing in troubled waters. He was of modest composition, and yet he asked himself whether an appearance of attentions from any gallant gentleman mightn't give another twist to her tangle. A flattering sense of unwonted opportunity, however--of such a possible value constituted for him as he had never before been invited to rise to--made him with the lapse of time more confident, possibly more reckless. It was too inspiring not to act upon the idea of kindling a truer light in his fair countrywoman's slow smile, and at least he hoped to persuade her that even a raw representative of the social order she had not done justice to was not necessarily a mere fortuitous collocation of atoms. He immediately called on her.

II

She had been placed for her education, fourteen years before, in a Parisian convent, by a widowed mamma who was fonder of Homburg and Nice than of letting out tucks in the frocks of a vigorously growing daughter. Here, besides various elegant accomplishments--the art of wearing a train, of composing a bouquet, of presenting a cup of tea--she acquired a certain turn of the imagination which might have passed for a sign of precocious worldliness. She dreamed of marrying a man of hierarchical "rank"--not for the pleasure of hearing herself called Madame la Vicomtesse, for which it seemed to her she should never greatly care, but because she had a romantic belief that the enjoyment of inherited and transmitted consideration, consideration attached to the fact of birth, would be the direct guarantee of an ideal delicacy of feeling. She supposed it would be found that the state of being noble does actually enforce the famous obligation. Romances are rarely worked out in such transcendent good faith, and Euphemia's excuse was the prime purity of her moral vision. She was essentially incorruptible, and she took this pernicious conceit to her bosom

very much as if it had been a dogma revealed by a white-winged angel. Even after experience had given her a hundred rude hints she found it easier to believe in fables, when they had a certain nobleness of meaning, than in well-attested but sordid facts. She believed that a gentleman with a long pedigree must be of necessity a very fine fellow, and enjoyment of a chance to carry further a family chronicle begun ever so far back must be, as a consciousness, a source of the most beautiful impulses. It wasn't therefore only that noblesse oblige, she thought, as regards yourself, but that it ensures as nothing else does in respect to your wife. She had never, at the start, spoken to a nobleman in her life, and these convictions were but a matter of extravagant theory. They were the fruit, in part, of the perusal of various Ultramontane works of fiction--the only ones admitted to the convent library--in which the hero was always a Legitimist vicomte who fought duels by the dozen but went twice a month to confession; and in part of the strong social scent of the gossip of her companions, many of them filles de haut lieu who, in the convent-garden, after Sundays at home, depicted their brothers and cousins as Prince Charmings and young Paladins. Euphemia listened and said nothing; she shrouded her visions of matrimony under a coronet in the silence that mostly surrounds all ecstatic faith. She was not of that type of young lady who is easily induced to declare that her husband must be six feet high and a little near-sighted, part his hair in the middle and have amber lights in his beard. To her companions her flights of fancy seemed short, rather, and poor and untutored; and even the fact that she was a sprig of the transatlantic democracy never sufficiently explained her apathy on social questions. She had a mental image of that son of the Crusaders who was to suffer her to adore him, but like many an artist who has produced a masterpiece of idealisation she shrank from exposing it to public criticism. It was the portrait of a gentleman rather ugly than handsome and rather poor than rich. But his ugliness was to be nobly expressive and his poverty delicately proud. She had a fortune of her own which, at the proper time, after fixing on her in eloquent silence those fine eyes that were to soften the feudal severity of his visage, he was to accept with a world of stifled protestations. One condition alone she was to make--that he should have "race" in a state as documented as it was possible to have it. On this she would stake her happiness; and it was so to happen that several accidents conspired to give convincing colour to this artless philosophy.

Inclined to long pauses and slow approaches herself, Euphemia was a great sitter at the feet of breathless volubility, and there were moments when she fairly hung upon the lips of Mademoiselle Marie de Mauves. Her intimacy with this chosen schoolmate was founded on the perception--all her own--that their differences were just the right ones. Mademoiselle de Mauves was very positive, very shrewd, very ironical, very French--everything that Euphemia felt herself unpardonable for not being. During her Sundays en ville she had examined the world and judged it, and she imparted her impressions to our attentive heroine with an agreeable mixture of enthusiasm and scepticism. She was moreover a handsome and well-grown person, on whom Euphemia's ribbons and trinkets had a trick of looking better than on their slender proprietress. She had finally the supreme merit of being a rigorous example of the virtue of exalted birth, having, as she did, ancestors honourably mentioned by Joinville and Commines, and a stately grandmother with a hooked nose who came up with her after the holidays from a veritable castel in Auvergne. It seemed to our own young woman that these attributes made her friend more at home in the world than if she had been the daughter of even the most prosperous grocer. A certain aristocratic impudence Mademoiselle de Mauves abundantly possessed, and her raids among her friend's finery were quite in the spirit of her baronial ancestors in the twelfth century--a spirit regarded by Euphemia but as a large way of understanding friendship, a freedom from conformities without style, and one that would sooner or later express itself in acts of surprising magnanimity. There doubtless prevailed in the breast of Mademoiselle de Mauves herself a dimmer vision of the large securities that Euphemia envied her. She was to become later in life so accomplished a schemer that her sense of having further heights to scale might well have waked up early. The especially fine appearance made by our heroine's ribbons and trinkets as her friend wore them ministered to pleasure on both sides, and the spell was not of a nature to be menaced by the young American's general gentleness. The concluding motive of Marie's writing to her grandmamma to invite Euphemia for a three weeks' holiday to the castel in Auvergne involved, however, the subtlest considerations. Mademoiselle de Mauves indeed, at this time seventeen years of age and capable of views as wide as her wants, was as proper a figure as could possibly have been found for the foreground of a scene artfully designed; and Euphemia, whose years were of like number, asked herself if a right harmony with such a place mightn't come by humble prayer. It is a proof of the sincerity of the latter's aspirations that the castel was not a shock to her faith. It was neither a cheerful nor a luxurious abode, but it was as full of wonders as a box of old heirlooms or objects "willed." It had battered towers and an empty moat, a rusty drawbridge and a court paved with crooked grass-grown slabs over which the antique coach-wheels of the lady with the hooked nose seemed to awaken the echoes of the seventeenth century. Euphemia was not frightened out of her dream; she had the pleasure of seeing all the easier passages translated into truth, as the learner of a language begins with the common words. She had a taste for old servants, old anecdotes, old furniture, faded household colours and sweetly stale odours--musty treasures in which the Chateau de Mauves abounded. She made a dozen sketches in water-colours after her conventual pattern; but sentimentally, as one may say, she was for ever sketching with a freer hand.

Old Madame de Mauves had nothing severe but her nose, and she seemed to Euphemia--what indeed she had every claim to pass for--the very image and pattern of an "historical character." Belonging to a great order of things, she patronised the young stranger who was ready to sit all day at her feet and listen to anecdotes of the bon temps and

quotations from the family chronicles. Madame de Mauves was a very honest old woman; she uttered her thoughts with ancient plainness. One day after pushing back Euphemia's shining locks and blinking with some tenderness from behind an immense face-a-main that acted as for the relegation of the girl herself to the glass case of a museum, she declared with an energetic shake of the head that she didn't know what to make of such a little person. And in answer to the little person's evident wonder, "I should like to advise you," she said, "but you seem to me so all of a piece that I'm afraid that if I advise you I shall spoil you. It's easy to see you're not one of us. I don't know whether you're better, but you seem to me to have been wound up by some key that isn't kept by your governess or your confessor or even your mother, but that you wear by a fine black ribbon round your own neck. Little persons in my day--when they were stupid they were very docile, but when they were clever they were very sly! You're clever enough, I imagine, and yet if I guessed all your secrets at this moment is there one I should have to frown at? I can tell you a wickeder one than any you've discovered for yourself. If you wish to live at ease in the *doux pays de France* don't trouble too much about the key of your conscience or even about your conscience itself--I mean your own particular one. You'll fancy it saying things it won't help your case to hear. They'll make you sad, and when you're sad you'll grow plain, and when you're plain you'll grow bitter, and when you're bitter you'll be *peu aimable*. I was brought up to think that a woman's first duty is to be infinitely so, and the happiest women I've known have been in fact those who performed this duty faithfully. As you're not a Catholic I suppose you can't be a devotee; and if you don't take life as a fifty years' mass the only way to take it's as a game of skill. Listen to this. Not to lose at the game of life you must--I don't say cheat, but not be too sure your neighbour won't, and not be shocked out of your self-possession if he does. Don't lose, my dear--I beseech you don't lose. Be neither suspicious nor credulous, and if you find your neighbour peeping don't cry out; only very politely wait your own chance. I've had my revenge more than once in my day, but I really think the sweetest I could take, *en somme*, against the past I've known, would be to have your blest innocence profit by my experience."

This was rather bewildering advice, but Euphemia understood it too little to be either edified or frightened. She sat listening to it very much as she would have listened to the speeches of an old lady in a comedy whose diction should strikingly correspond to the form of her high-backed armchair and the fashion of her coif. Her indifference was doubly dangerous, for Madame de Mauves spoke at the instance of coming events, and her words were the result of a worry of scruples--scruples in the light of which Euphemia was on the one hand too tender a victim to be sacrificed to an ambition and the prosperity of her own house on the other too precious a heritage to be sacrificed to an hesitation. The prosperity in question had suffered repeated and grievous breaches and the menaced institution been overmuch pervaded by that cold comfort in which people are obliged to balance dinner-table allusions to feudal ancestors against the absence of side-dishes; a state of things the sorrier as the family was now mainly represented by a gentleman whose appetite was large and who justly maintained that its historic glories hadn't been established by underfed heroes.

Three days after Euphemia's arrival Richard de Mauves, coming down from Paris to pay his respects to his grandmother, treated our heroine to her first encounter with a *gentilhomme* in the flesh. On appearing he kissed his grandmother's hand with a smile which caused her to draw it away with dignity, and set Euphemia, who was standing by, to ask herself what could have happened between them. Her unanswered wonder was but the beginning of a long chain of puzzlements, but the reader is free to know that the smile of M. de Mauves was a reply to a postscript affixed by the old lady to a letter addressed to him by her granddaughter as soon as the girl had been admitted to justify the latter's promises. Mademoiselle de Mauves brought her letter to her grandmother for approval, but obtained no more than was expressed in a frigid nod. The old lady watched her with this coldness while she proceeded to seal the letter, then suddenly bade her open it again and bring her a pen.

"Your sister's flatteries are all nonsense," she wrote; "the young lady's far too good for you, *mauvais sujet* beyond redemption. If you've a particle of conscience you'll not come and disturb the repose of an angel of innocence."

The other relative of the subject of this warning, who had read these lines, made up a little face as she freshly indited the address; but she laid down her pen with a confident nod which might have denoted that by her judgement her brother was appealed to on the ground of a principle that didn't exist in him. And "if you meant what you said," the young man on his side observed to his grandmother on his first private opportunity, "it would have been simpler not to have sent the letter."

Put out of humour perhaps by this gross impugment of her sincerity, the head of the family kept her room on pretexts during a greater part of Euphemia's stay, so that the latter's angelic innocence was left all to her grandson's mercy. It suffered no worse mischance, however, than to be prompted to intenser communion with itself. Richard de Mauves was the hero of the young girl's romance made real, and so completely accordant with this creature of her imagination that she felt afraid of him almost as she would have been of a figure in a framed picture who should have stepped down from the wall. He was now thirty-three--young enough to suggest possibilities of ardent activity and old enough to have formed opinions that a simple woman might deem it an intellectual privilege to listen to. He was perhaps a trifle handsomer than Euphemia's rather grim Quixotic ideal, but a very few days reconciled her to his good looks as effectually they would have reconciled her to a characterised want of them. He was quiet, grave, eminently distinguished. He spoke little, but his remarks, without being sententious, had a nobleness of tone that caused them to

re-echo in the young girl's ears at the end of the day. He paid her very little direct attention, but his chance words--when he only asked her if she objected to his cigarette--were accompanied by a smile of extraordinary kindness.

It happened that shortly after his arrival, riding an unruly horse which Euphemia had with shy admiration watched him mount in the castle-yard, he was thrown with a violence which, without disparaging his skill, made him for a fortnight an interesting invalid lounging in the library with a bandaged knee. To beguile his confinement the accomplished young stranger was repeatedly induced to sing for him, which she did with a small natural tremor that might have passed for the finish of vocal art. He never overwhelmed her with compliments, but he listened with unfailing attention, remembered all her melodies and would sit humming them to himself. While his imprisonment lasted indeed he passed hours in her company, making her feel not unlike some unfriended artist who has suddenly gained the opportunity to devote a fortnight to the study of a great model. Euphemia studied with noiseless diligence what she supposed to be the "character" of M. de Mauves, and the more she looked the more fine lights and shades she seemed to behold in this masterpiece of nature. M. de Mauves's character indeed, whether from a sense of being so generously and intensely taken for granted, or for reasons which bid graceful defiance to analysis, had never been so much on show, even to the very casual critic lodged, as might be said, in an out-of-the-way corner of it; it seemed really to reflect the purity of Euphemia's pious opinion. There had been nothing especially to admire in the state of mind in which he left Paris--a settled resolve to marry a young person whose charms might or might not justify his sister's account of them, but who was mistress, at the worst, of a couple of hundred thousand francs a year. He had not counted out sentiment--if she pleased him so much the better; but he had left a meagre margin for it and would hardly have admitted that so excellent a match could be improved by it. He was a robust and serene sceptic, and it was a singular fate for a man who believed in nothing to be so tenderly believed in. What his original faith had been he could hardly have told you, for as he came back to his childhood's home to mend his fortunes by pretending to fall in love he was a thoroughly perverse creature and overlaid with more corruptions than a summer day's questioning of his conscience would have put to flight. Ten years' pursuit of pleasure, which a bureau full of unpaid bills was all he had to show for, had pretty well stifled the natural lad whose violent will and generous temper might have been shaped by a different pressure to some such showing as would have justified a romantic faith. So should he have exhaled the natural fragrance of a late-blooming flower of hereditary honour. His violence indeed had been subdued and he had learned to be irreproachably polite; but he had lost the fineness of his generosity, and his politeness, which in the long run society paid for, was hardly more than a form of luxurious egotism, like his fondness for ciphered pocket-handkerchiefs, lavender gloves and other fopperies by which shopkeepers remained out of pocket. In after-years he was terribly polite to his wife. He had formed himself, as the phrase was, and the form prescribed to him by the society into which his birth and his tastes had introduced him was marked by some peculiar features. That which mainly concerns us is its classification of the fairer half of humanity as objects not essentially different--say from those very lavender gloves that are soiled in an evening and thrown away. To do M. de Mauves justice, he had in the course of time encountered in the feminine character such plentiful evidence of its pliant softness and fine adjustability that idealism naturally seemed to him a losing game.

Euphemia, as he lay on his sofa, struck him as by no means contradictory; she simply reminded him that very young women are generally innocent and that this is on the whole the most potent source of their attraction. Her innocence moved him to perfect consideration, and it seemed to him that if he shortly became her husband it would be exposed to a danger the less. Old Madame de Mauves, who flattered herself that in this whole matter she was very laudably rigid, might almost have taken a lesson from the delicacy he practised. For two or three weeks her grandson was well-nigh a blushing boy again. He watched from behind the Figaro, he admired and desired and held his tongue. He found himself not in the least moved to a flirtation; he had no wish to trouble the waters he proposed to transfuse into the golden cup of matrimony. Sometimes a word, a look, a gesture of Euphemia's gave him the oddest sense of being, or of seeming at least, almost bashful; for she had a way of not dropping her eyes according to the mysterious virginal mechanism, of not fluttering out of the room when she found him there alone, of treating him rather as a glorious than as a pernicious influence--a radiant frankness of demeanour in fine, despite an infinite natural reserve, which it seemed at once graceless not to be complimentary about and indelicate not to take for granted. In this way had been wrought in the young man's mind a vague unwonted resonance of soft impressions, as we may call it, which resembled the happy stir of the change from dreaming pleasantly to waking happily. His imagination was touched; he was very fond of music and he now seemed to give easy ear to some of the sweetest he had ever heard. In spite of the bore of being laid up with a lame knee he was in better humour than he had known for months; he lay smoking cigarettes and listening to the nightingales with the satisfied smile of one of his country neighbours whose big ox should have taken the prize at a fair. Every now and then, with an impatient suspicion of the resemblance, he declared himself pitifully bete; but he was under a charm that braved even the supreme penalty of seeming ridiculous. One morning he had half an hour's tete-a-tete with his grandmother's confessor, a soft-voiced old Abbe whom, for reasons of her own, Madame de Mauves had suddenly summoned and had left waiting in the drawing-room while she rearranged her curls. His reverence, going up to the old lady, assured her that M. le Comte was in a most edifying state of mind and the likeliest subject for the operation of grace. This was a theological interpretation of the count's unusual equanimity. He had always lazily

wondered what priests were good for, and he now remembered, with a sense of especial obligation to the Abbe, that they were excellent for marrying people.

A day or two after this he left off his bandages and tried to walk. He made his way into the garden and hobbled successfully along one of the alleys, but in the midst of his progress was pulled up by a spasm of pain which forced him to stop and call for help. In an instant Euphemia came tripping along the path and offered him her arm with the frankest solicitude.

"Not to the house," he said, taking it; "further on, to the bosquet." This choice was prompted by her having immediately confessed that she had seen him leave the house, had feared an accident and had followed him on tiptoe.

"Why didn't you join me?" he had asked, giving her a look in which admiration was no longer disguised and yet felt itself half at the mercy of her replying that a jeune fille shouldn't be seen following a gentleman. But it drew a breath which filled its lungs for a long time afterwards when she replied simply that if she had overtaken him he might have accepted her arm out of politeness, whereas she wished to have the pleasure of seeing him walk alone.

The bosquet was covered with an odorous tangle of blossoming creepers, and a nightingale overhead was shaking out love-notes with a profusion that made the Count feel his own conduct the last word of propriety. "I've always heard that in America, when a man wishes to marry a young girl, he offers himself simply face to face and without ceremony--without parents and uncles and aunts and cousins sitting round in a circle."

"Why I believe so," said Euphemia, staring and too surprised to be alarmed.

"Very well then--suppose our arbour here to be your great sensible country. I offer you my hand a l'Americaine. It will make me intensely happy to feel you accept it."

Whether Euphemia's acceptance was in the American manner is more than I can say; I incline to think that for fluttering grateful trustful softly-amazed young hearts there is only one manner all over the world.

That evening, in the massive turret chamber it was her happiness to inhabit, she wrote a dutiful letter to her mamma, and had just sealed it when she was sent for by Madame de Mauves. She found this ancient lady seated in her boudoir in a lavender satin gown and with her candles all lighted as for the keeping of some fete. "Are you very happy?" the old woman demanded, making Euphemia sit down before her.

"I'm almost afraid to say so, lest I should wake myself up."

"May you never wake up, belle enfant," Madame de Mauves grandly returned. "This is the first marriage ever made in our family in this way--by a Comte de Mauves proposing to a young girl in an arbour like Jeannot and Jeannette. It has not been our way of doing things, and people may say it wants frankness. My grandson tells me he regards it--for the conditions--as the perfection of good taste. Very well. I'm a very old woman, and if your differences should ever be as marked as your agreements I shouldn't care to see them. But I should be sorry to die and think you were going to be unhappy. You can't be, my dear, beyond a certain point; because, though in this world the Lord sometimes makes light of our expectations he never altogether ignores our deserts. But you're very young and innocent and easy to dazzle. There never was a man in the world--among the saints themselves--as good as you believe my grandson. But he's a galant homme and a gentleman, and I've been talking to him to-night. To you I want to say this--that you're to forget the worldly rubbish I talked the other day about the happiness of frivolous women. It's not the kind of happiness that would suit you, ma toute-belle. Whatever befalls you, promise me this: to be, to remain, your own sincere little self only, charming in your own serious little way. The Comtesse de Mauves will be none the worse for it. Your brave little self, understand, in spite of everything--bad precepts and bad examples, bad fortune and even bad usage. Be persistently and patiently just what the good God has made you, and even one of us--and one of those who is most what we ARE--will do you justice!"

Euphemia remembered this speech in after-years, and more than once, wearily closing her eyes, she seemed to see the old woman sitting upright in her faded finery and smiling grimly like one of the Fates who sees the wheel of fortune turning up her favourite event. But at the moment it had for her simply the proper gravity of the occasion: this was the way, she supposed, in which lucky young girls were addressed on their engagement by wise old women of quality.

At her convent, to which she immediately returned, she found a letter from her mother which disconcerted her far more than the remarks of Madame de Mauves. Who were these people, Mrs. Cleve demanded, who had presumed to talk to her daughter of marriage without asking her leave? Questionable gentleness plainly; the best French people never did such things. Euphemia would return straightway to her convent, shut herself up and await her own arrival. It took Mrs. Cleve three weeks to travel from Nice to Paris, and during this time the young girl had no communication with her lover beyond accepting a bouquet of violets marked with his initials and left by a female friend. "I've not brought you up with such devoted care," she declared to her daughter at their first interview, "to marry a presumptuous and penniless Frenchman. I shall take you straight home and you'll please forget M. de Mauves."

Mrs. Cleve received that evening at her hotel a visit from this personage which softened her wrath but failed to modify her decision. He had very good manners, but she was sure he had horrible morals; and the lady, who had been a good-natured censor on her own account, felt a deep and real need to sacrifice her daughter to propriety. She belonged

to that large class of Americans who make light of their native land in familiar discourse but are startled back into a sense of having blasphemed when they find Europeans taking them at their word. "I know the type, my dear," she said to her daughter with a competent nod. "He won't beat you. Sometimes you'll wish he would."

Euphemia remained solemnly silent, for the only answer she felt capable of making was that her mother's mind was too small a measure of things and her lover's type an historic, a social masterpiece that it took some mystic illumination to appreciate. A person who confounded him with the common throng of her watering-place acquaintance was not a person to argue with. It struck the girl she had simply no cause to plead; her cause was in the Lord's hands and in those of M. de Mauves.

This agent of Providence had been irritated and mortified by Mrs. Cleve's opposition, and hardly knew how to handle an adversary who failed to perceive that a member of his family gave of necessity more than he received. But he had obtained information on his return to Paris which exalted the uses of humility. Euphemia's fortune, wonderful to say, was greater than its fame, and in view of such a prize, even a member of his family could afford to take a snubbing.

The young man's tact, his deference, his urbane insistence, won a concession from Mrs. Cleve. The engagement was to be put off and her daughter was to return home, be brought out and receive the homage she was entitled to and which might well take a form representing peril to the suit of this first headlong aspirant. They were to exchange neither letters nor mementoes nor messages; but if at the end of two years Euphemia had refused offers enough to attest the permanence of her attachment he should receive an invitation to address her again. This decision was promulgated in the presence of the parties interested. The Count bore himself gallantly, looking at his young friend as if he expected some tender protestation. But she only looked at him silently in return, neither weeping nor smiling nor putting out her hand. On this they separated, and as M. de Mauves walked away he declared to himself that in spite of the confounded two years he was one of the luckiest of men--to have a fiancee who to several millions of francs added such strangely beautiful eyes.

How many offers Euphemia refused but scantily concerns us--and how the young man wore his two years away. He found he required pastimes, and as pastimes were expensive he added heavily to the list of debts to be cancelled by Euphemia's fortune. Sometimes, in the thick of what he had once called pleasure with a keener conviction than now, he put to himself the case of their failing him after all; and then he remembered that last mute assurance of her pale face and drew a long breath of such confidence as he felt in nothing else in the world save his own punctuality in an affair of honour.

At last, one morning, he took the express to Havre with a letter of Mrs. Cleve's in his pocket, and ten days later made his bow to mother and daughter in New York. His stay was brief, and he was apparently unable to bring himself to view what Euphemia's uncle, Mr. Butterworth, who gave her away at the altar, called our great experiment of democratic self-government, in a serious light. He smiled at everything and seemed to regard the New World as a colossal plaisanterie. It is true that a perpetual smile was the most natural expression of countenance for a man about to marry Euphemia Cleve.

III

Longmore's first visit seemed to open to him so large a range of quiet pleasure that he very soon paid a second, and at the end of a fortnight had spent uncounted hours in the little drawing-room which Madame de Mauves rarely quitted except to drive or walk in the forest. She lived in an old-fashioned pavilion, between a high-walled court and an excessively artificial garden, beyond whose enclosure you saw a long line of tree-tops. Longmore liked the garden and in the mild afternoons used to move his chair through the open window to the smooth terrace which overlooked it while his hostess sat just within. Presently she would come out and wander through the narrow alleys and beside the thin-spouting fountain, and at last introduce him to a private gate in the high wall, the opening to a lane which led to the forest. Hitherwards she more than once strolled with him, bareheaded and meaning to go but twenty rods, but always going good-naturedly further and often stretching it to the freedom of a promenade. They found many things to talk about, and to the pleasure of feeling the hours slip along like some silver stream Longmore was able to add the satisfaction of suspecting that he was a "resource" for Madame de Mauves. He had made her acquaintance with the sense, not wholly inspiring, that she was a woman with a painful twist in her life and that seeking her acquaintance would be like visiting at a house where there was an invalid who could bear no noise. But he very soon recognised that her grievance, if grievance it was, was not aggressive; that it was not fond of attitudes and ceremonies, and that her most earnest wish was to remember it as little as possible. He felt that even if Mrs. Draper hadn't told him she was unhappy he would have guessed it, and yet that he couldn't have pointed to his proof. The evidence was chiefly negative--she never alluded to her husband. Beyond this it seemed to him simply that her whole being was pitched in a

lower key than harmonious Nature had designed; she was like a powerful singer who had lost her high notes. She never drooped nor sighed nor looked unutterable things; she dealt no sarcastic digs at her fate; she had in short none of the conscious graces of the woman wronged. Only Longmore was sure that her gentle gaiety was but the milder or sharper flush of a settled ache, and that she but tried to interest herself in his thoughts in order to escape from her own. If she had wished to irritate his curiosity and lead him to take her confidence by storm nothing could have served her purpose better than this studied discretion. He measured the rare magnanimity of self-effacement so deliberate, he felt how few women were capable of exchanging a luxurious woe for a thankless effort. Madame de Mauves, he himself felt, wasn't sweeping the horizon for a compensation or a consoler; she had suffered a personal deception that had disgusted her with persons. She wasn't planning to get the worth of her trouble back in some other way; for the present she was proposing to live with it peaceably, reputably and without scandal--turning the key on it occasionally as you would on a companion liable to attacks of insanity. Longmore was a man of fine senses and of a speculative spirit, leading-strings that had never been slipped. He began to regard his hostess as a figure haunted by a shadow which was somehow her intenser and more authentic self. This lurking duality in her put on for him an extraordinary charm. Her delicate beauty acquired to his eye the serious cast of certain blank-browed Greek statues; and sometimes when his imagination, more than his ear, detected a vague tremor in the tone in which she attempted to make a friendly question seem to have behind it none of the hollow resonance of absent-mindedness, his marvelling eyes gave her an answer more eloquent, though much less to the point, than the one she demanded.

She supplied him indeed with much to wonder about, so that he fitted, in his ignorance, a dozen high-flown theories to her apparent history. She had married for love and staked her whole soul on it; of that he was convinced. She hadn't changed her allegiance to be near Paris and her base of supplies of millinery; he was sure she had seen her perpetrated mistake in a light of which her present life, with its conveniences for shopping and its moral aridity, was the absolute negation. But by what extraordinary process of the heart--through what mysterious intermission of that moral instinct which may keep pace with the heart even when this organ is making unprecedented time--had she fixed her affections on an insolently frivolous Frenchman? Longmore needed no telling; he knew that M. de Mauves was both cynical and shallow; these things were stamped on his eyes, his nose, his mouth, his voice, his gesture, his step. Of Frenchwomen themselves, when all was said, our young man, full of nursed discriminations, went in no small fear; they all seemed to belong to the type of a certain fine lady to whom he had ventured to present a letter of introduction and whom, directly after his first visit to her, he had set down in his note-book as "metallic." Why should Madame de Mauves have chosen a Frenchwoman's lot--she whose nature had an atmospheric envelope absent even from the brightest metals? He asked her one day frankly if it had cost her nothing to transplant herself--if she weren't oppressed with a sense of irreconcilable difference from "all these people." She replied nothing at first, till he feared she might think it her duty to resent a question that made light of all her husband's importances. He almost wished she would; it would seem a proof that her policy of silence had a limit. "I almost grew up here," she said at last, "and it was here for me those visions of the future took shape that we all have when we begin to think or to dream beyond mere playtime. As matters stand one may be very American and yet arrange it with one's conscience to live in Europe. My imagination perhaps--I had a little when I was younger--helped me to think I should find happiness here. And after all, for a woman, what does it signify? This isn't America, no--this element, but it's quite as little France. France is out there beyond the garden, France is in the town and the forest; but here, close about me, in my room and"--she paused a moment--"in my mind, it's a nameless, and doubtless not at all remarkable, little country of my own. It's not her country," she added, "that makes a woman happy or unhappy."

Madame Clairin, Euphemia's sister-in-law, might meanwhile have been supposed to have undertaken the graceful task of making Longmore ashamed of his uncivil jottings about her sex and nation. Mademoiselle de Mauves, bringing example to the confirmation of precept, had made a remunerative match and sacrificed her name to the millions of a prosperous and aspiring wholesale druggist--a gentleman liberal enough to regard his fortune as a moderate price for being towed into circles unpervaded by pharmaceutic odours. His system possibly was sound, but his own application of it to be deplored. M. Clairin's head was turned by his good luck. Having secured an aristocratic wife he adopted an aristocratic vice and began to gamble at the Bourse. In an evil hour he lost heavily, and then staked heavily to recover himself. But he was to learn that the law of compensation works with no such pleasing simplicity, and he rolled to the dark bottom of his folly. There he felt everything go--his wits, his courage, his probity, everything that had made him what his fatuous marriage had so promptly unmade. He walked up the Rue Vivienne with his hands in his empty pockets and stood half an hour staring confusedly up and down the brave boulevard. People brushed against him and half a dozen carriages almost ran over him, until at last a policeman, who had been watching him for some time, took him by the arm and led him gently away. He looked at the man's cocked hat and sword with tears in his eyes; he hoped for some practical application of the wrath of heaven, something that would express violently his dead-weight of self-abhorrence. The sergent de ville, however, only stationed him in the embrasure of a door, out of harm's way, and walked off to supervise a financial contest between an old lady and a cabman. Poor M. Clairin had only been married a year, but he had had time to measure the great spirit of true children of the anciens preux. When night had fallen he repaired to the house of a friend and asked for a night's lodging; and as his friend, who was simply his old head book-keeper

and lived in a small way, was put to some trouble to accommodate him, "You must pardon me," the poor man said, "but I can't go home. I'm afraid of my wife!" Toward morning he blew his brains out. His widow turned the remnants of his property to better account than could have been expected and wore the very handsomest mourning. It was for this latter reason perhaps that she was obliged to retrench at other points and accept a temporary home under her brother's roof.

Fortune had played Madame Clairin a terrible trick, but had found an adversary and not a victim. Though quite without beauty she had always had what is called the grand air, and her air from this time forth was grander than ever. As she trailed about in her sable furbelows, tossing back her well-dressed head and holding up her vigilant long-handled eyeglass, she seemed to be sweeping the whole field of society and asking herself where she should pluck her revenge. Suddenly she espied it, ready made to her hand, in poor Longmore's wealth and amiability. American dollars and American complaisance had made her brother's fortune; why shouldn't they make hers? She overestimated the wealth and misinterpreted the amiability; for she was sure a man could neither be so contented without being rich nor so "backward" without being weak. Longmore met her advances with a formal politeness that covered a good deal of unflattering discomposure. She made him feel deeply uncomfortable; and though he was at a loss to conceive how he could be an object of interest to a sharp Parisienne he had an indefinable sense of being enclosed in a magnetic circle, of having become the victim of an incantation. If Madame Clairin could have fathomed his Puritanic soul she would have laid by her wand and her book and dismissed him for an impossible subject. She gave him a moral chill, and he never named her to himself save as that dreadful woman--that awful woman. He did justice to her grand air, but for his pleasure he preferred the small air of Madame de Mauves; and he never made her his bow, after standing frigidly passive for five minutes to one of her gracious overtures to intimacy, without feeling a peculiar desire to ramble away into the forest, fling himself down on the warm grass and, staring up at the blue sky, forget that there were any women in nature who didn't please like the swaying tree-tops. One day, on his arrival at the house, she met him in the court with the news that her sister-in-law was shut up with a headache and that his visit must be for HER. He followed her into the drawing-room with the best grace at his command, and sat twirling his hat for half an hour. Suddenly he understood her; her caressing cadences were so almost explicit an invitation to solicit the charming honour of her hand. He blushed to the roots of his hair and jumped up with uncontrollable alacrity; then, dropping a glance at Madame Clairin, who sat watching him with hard eyes over the thin edge of her smile, perceived on her brow a flash of unforgiving wrath. It was not pleasing in itself, but his eyes lingered a moment, for it seemed to show off her character. What he saw in the picture frightened him and he felt himself murmur "Poor Madame de Mauves!" His departure was abrupt, and this time he really went into the forest and lay down on the grass.

After which he admired his young countrywoman more than ever; her intrinsic clearness shone out to him even through the darker shade cast over it. At the end of a month he received a letter from a friend with whom he had arranged a tour through the Low Countries, reminding him of his promise to keep their tryst at Brussels. It was only after his answer was posted that he fully measured the zeal with which he had declared that the journey must either be deferred or abandoned--since he couldn't possibly leave Saint-Germain. He took a walk in the forest and asked himself if this were indeed portentously true. Such a truth somehow made it surely his duty to march straight home and put together his effects. Poor Webster, who, he knew, had counted ardently on this excursion, was the best of men; six weeks ago he would have gone through anything to join poor Webster. It had never been in his books to throw overboard a friend whom he had loved ten years for a married woman whom he had six weeks--well, admired. It was certainly beyond question that he hung on at Saint-Germain because this admirable married woman was there; but in the midst of so much admiration what had become of his fine old power to conclude? This was the conduct of a man not judging but drifting, and he had pretended never to drift. If she were as unhappy as he believed the active sympathy of such a man would help her very little more than his indifference; if she were less so she needed no help and could dispense with his professions. He was sure moreover that if she knew he was staying on her account she would be extremely annoyed. This very feeling indeed had much to do with making it hard to go; her displeasure would be the flush on the snow of the high cold stoicism that touched him to the heart. At moments withal he assured himself that staying to watch her--and what else did it come to?--was simply impertinent; it was gross to keep tugging at the cover of a book so intentionally closed. Then inclination answered that some day her self-support would fail, and he had a vision of this exquisite creature calling vainly for help. He would just be her friend to any length, and it was unworthy of either to think about consequences. He was a friend, however, who nursed a brooding regret for his not having known her five years earlier, as well as a particular objection to those who had smartly anticipated him. It seemed one of fortune's most mocking strokes that she should be surrounded by persons whose only merit was that they threw every side of her, as she turned in her pain, into radiant relief.

Our young man's growing irritation made it more and more difficult for him to see any other merit than this in Richard de Mauves. And yet, disinterestedly, it would have been hard to give a name to the pitiless perversity lighted by such a conclusion, and there were times when Longmore was almost persuaded against his finer judgement that he was really the most considerate of husbands and that it was not a man's fault if his wife's love of life had pitched itself once for all in the minor key. The Count's manners were perfect, his discretion irreproachable, and he seemed never to

address his companion but, sentimentally speaking, hat in hand. His tone to Longmore--as the latter was perfectly aware--was that of a man of the world to a man not quite of the world; but what it lacked in true frankness it made up in easy form. "I can't thank you enough for having overcome my wife's shyness," he more than once declared. "If we left her to do as she pleased she would--in her youth and her beauty--bury herself all absurdly alive. Come often, and bring your good friends and compatriots--some of them are so amusing. She'll have nothing to do with mine, but perhaps you'll be able to offer her better son affaire."

M. de Mauves made these speeches with a bright assurance very amazing to our hero, who had an innocent belief that a man's head may point out to him the shortcomings of his heart and make him ashamed of them. He couldn't fancy him formed both to neglect his wife and to take the derisive view of her minding it. Longmore had at any rate an exasperated sense that this nobleman thought rather the less of their interesting friend on account of that very same fine difference of nature which so deeply stirred his own sympathies. He was rarely present during the sessions of the American visitor, and he made a daily journey to Paris, where he had *de gros soucis d'affaires* as he once mentioned--with an all-embracing flourish and not in the least in the tone of apology. When he appeared it was late in the evening and with an imperturbable air of being on the best of terms with every one and every thing which was peculiarly annoying if you happened to have a tacit quarrel with him. If he was an honest man he was an honest man somehow spoiled for confidence. Something he had, however, that his critic vaguely envied, something in his address, splendidly positive, a manner rounded and polished by the habit of conversation and the friction of full experience, an urbanity exercised for his own sake, not for his neighbour's, which seemed the fruit of one of those strong temperaments that rule the inward scene better than the best conscience. The Count had plainly no sense for morals, and poor Longmore, who had the finest, would have been glad to borrow his recipe for appearing then so to range the whole scale of the senses. What was it that enabled him, short of being a monster with visibly cloven feet and exhaling brimstone, to misprize so cruelly a nature like his wife's and to walk about the world with such a handsome invincible grin? It was the essential grossness of his imagination, which had nevertheless helped him to such a store of neat speeches. He could be highly polite and could doubtless be damnably impertinent, but the life of the spirit was a world as closed to him as the world of great music to a man without an ear. It was ten to one he didn't in the least understand how his wife felt; he and his smooth sister had doubtless agreed to regard their relative as a Puritanical little person, of meagre aspirations and few talents, content with looking at Paris from the terrace and, as a special treat, having a countryman very much like herself to regale her with innocent echoes of their native wit. M. de Mauves was tired of his companion; he liked women who could, frankly, amuse him better. She was too dim, too delicate, too modest; she had too few arts, too little coquetry, too much charity. Lighting a cigar some day while he summed up his situation, her husband had probably decided she was incurably stupid. It was the same taste, in essence, our young man moralised, as the taste for M. Gerome and M. Baudry in painting and for M. Gustave Flaubert and M. Charles Baudelaire in literature. The Count was a pagan and his wife a Christian, and between them an impassable gulf. He was by race and instinct a grand seigneur. Longmore had often heard of that historic type, and was properly grateful for an opportunity to examine it closely. It had its elegance of outline, but depended on spiritual sources so remote from those of which he felt the living gush in his own soul that he found himself gazing at it, in irreconcilable antipathy, through a dim historic mist. "I'm a modern bourgeois," he said, "and not perhaps so good a judge of how far a pretty woman's tongue may go at supper before the mirrors properly crack to hear. But I've not met one of the rarest of women without recognising her, without making my reflexion that, charm for charm, such a *maniere d'etre* is more 'fetching' even than the worst of Theresa's songs sung by a dissipated duchess. Wit for wit, I think mine carries me further." It was easy indeed to perceive that, as became a grand seigneur, M. de Mauves had a stock of social principles. He wouldn't especially have desired perhaps that his wife should compete in amateur operettas with the duchesses in question, for the most part of comparatively recent origin; but he held that a gentleman may take his amusement where he finds it, that he is quite at liberty not to find it at home, and that even an adoptive daughter of his house who should hang her head and have red eyes and allow herself to make any other response to officious condolence than that her husband's amusements were his own affair, would have forfeited every claim to having her finger-tips bowed over and kissed. And yet in spite of this definite faith Longmore figured him much inconvenienced by the Countess's avoidance of betrayals. Did it dimly occur to him that the principle of this reserve was self-control and not self-effacement? She was a model to all the inferior matrons of his line, past and to come, and an occasional "scene" from her at a manageable hour would have had something reassuring--would have attested her stupidity rather better than this mere polish of her patience.

Longmore would have given much to be able to guess how this latter secret worked, and he tried more than once, though timidly and awkwardly enough, to make out the game she was playing. She struck him as having long resisted the force of cruel evidence, and, as though succumbing to it at last, having denied herself on simple grounds of generosity the right to complain. Her faith might have perished, but the sense of her own old deep perversity remained. He believed her thus quite capable of reproaching herself with having expected too much and of trying to persuade herself out of her bitterness by saying that her hopes had been vanities and follies and that what was before her was simply Life. "I hate tragedy," she once said to him; "I'm a dreadful coward about having to suffer or to bleed. I've always tried to believe that--without base concessions--such extremities may always somehow be dodged or

indefinitely postponed. I should be willing to buy myself off, from having ever to be OVERWHELMED, by giving up--well, any amusement you like." She lived evidently in nervous apprehension of being fatally convinced--of seeing to the end of her deception. Longmore, when he thought of this, felt the force of his desire to offer her something of which she could be as sure as of the sun in heaven.

IV

His friend Webster meanwhile lost no time in accusing him of the basest infidelity and in asking him what he found at suburban Saint-Germain to prefer to Van Eyck and Memling, Rubens and Rembrandt. A day or two after the receipt of this friend's letter he took a walk with Madame de Mauves in the forest. They sat down on a fallen log and she began to arrange into a bouquet the anemones and violets she had gathered. "I've a word here," he said at last, "from a friend whom I some time ago promised to join in Brussels. The time has come--it has passed. It finds me terribly unwilling to leave Saint-Germain."

She looked up with the immediate interest she always showed in his affairs, but with no hint of a disposition to make a personal application of his words. "Saint-Germain is pleasant enough, but are you doing yourself justice? Shan't you regret in future days that instead of travelling and seeing cities and monuments and museums and improving your mind you simply sat here--for instance--on a log and pulled my flowers to pieces?"

"What I shall regret in future days," he answered after some hesitation, "is that I should have sat here--sat here so much--and never have shown what's the matter with me. I'm fond of museums and monuments and of improving my mind, and I'm particularly fond of my friend Webster. But I can't bring myself to leave Saint-Germain without asking you a question. You must forgive me if it's indiscreet and be assured that curiosity was never more respectful. Are you really as unhappy as I imagine you to be?"

She had evidently not expected his appeal, and, making her change colour, it took her unprepared. "If I strike you as unhappy," she none the less simply said, "I've been a poorer friend to you than I wished to be."

"I, perhaps, have been a better friend of yours than you've supposed," he returned. "I've admired your reserve, your courage, your studied gaiety. But I've felt the existence of something beneath them that was more YOU--more you as I wished to know you--than they were; some trouble in you that I've permitted myself to hate and resent."

She listened all gravely, but without an air of offence, and he felt that while he had been timorously calculating the last consequences of friendship she had quietly enough accepted them. "You surprise me," she said slowly, and her flush still lingered. "But to refuse to answer you would confirm some impression in you even now much too strong. Any 'trouble'--if you mean any unhappiness--that one can sit comfortably talking about is an unhappiness with distinct limitations. If I were examined before a board of commissioners for testing the felicity of mankind I'm sure I should be pronounced a very fortunate woman." There was something that deeply touched him in her tone, and this quality pierced further as she continued. "But let me add, with all gratitude for your sympathy, that it's my own affair altogether. It needn't disturb you, my dear sir," she wound up with a certain quaintness of gaiety, "for I've often found myself in your company contented enough and diverted enough."

"Well, you're a wonderful woman," the young man declared, "and I admire you as I've never admired any one. You're wiser than anything I, for one, can say to you; and what I ask of you is not to let me advise or console you, but simply thank you for letting me know you." He had intended no such outburst as this, but his voice rang loud and he felt an unfamiliar joy as he uttered it.

She shook her head with some impatience. "Let us be friends--as I supposed we were going to be--without protestations and fine words. To have you paying compliments to my wisdom--that would be real wretchedness. I can dispense with your admiration better than the Flemish painters can--better than Van Eyck and Rubens, in spite of all their worshippers. Go join your friend--see everything, enjoy everything, learn everything, and write me an excellent letter, brimming over with your impressions. I'm extremely fond of the Dutch painters," she added with the faintest quaver in the world, an impressible break of voice that Longmore had noticed once or twice before and had interpreted as the sudden weariness, the controlled convulsion, of a spirit self-condemned to play a part.

"I don't believe you care a button for the Dutch painters," he said with a laugh. "But I shall certainly write you a letter."

She rose and turned homeward, thoughtfully rearranging her flowers as she walked. Little was said; Longmore was asking himself with an agitation of his own in the unspoken words whether all this meant simply that he was in love. He looked at the rooks wheeling against the golden-hued sky, between the tree-tops, but not at his companion, whose personal presence seemed lost in the felicity she had created. Madame de Mauves was silent and grave--she felt she had almost grossly failed and she was proportionately disappointed. An emotional friendship she had not desired; her

scheme had been to pass with her visitor as a placid creature with a good deal of leisure which she was disposed to devote to profitable conversation of an impersonal sort. She liked him extremely, she felt in him the living force of something to which, when she made up her girlish mind that a needy nobleman was the ripest fruit of time, she had done too scant justice. They went through the little gate in the garden-wall and approached the house. On the terrace Madame Clairin was entertaining a friend--a little elderly gentleman with a white moustache and an order in his buttonhole. Madame de Mauves chose to pass round the house into the court; whereupon her sister-in-law, greeting Longmore with an authoritative nod, lifted her eye-glass and stared at them as they went by. Longmore heard the little old gentleman uttering some old-fashioned epigram about "la vieille galanterie francaise"--then by a sudden impulse he looked at Madame de Mauves and wondered what she was doing in such a world. She stopped before the house, not asking him to come in. "I hope you will act on my advice and waste no more time at Saint-Germain."

For an instant there rose to his lips some faded compliment about his time not being wasted, but it expired before the simple sincerity of her look. She stood there as gently serious as the angel of disinterestedness, and it seemed to him he should insult her by treating her words as a bait for flattery. "I shall start in a day or two," he answered, "but I won't promise you not to come back."

"I hope not," she said simply. "I expect to be here a long time."

"I shall come and say good-bye," he returned--which she appeared to accept with a smile as she went in.

He stood a moment, then walked slowly homeward by the terrace. It seemed to him that to leave her thus, for a gain on which she herself insisted, was to know her better and admire her more. But he was aware of a vague ferment of feeling which her evasion of his question half an hour before had done more to deepen than to allay. In the midst of it suddenly, on the great terrace of the Chateau, he encountered M. de Mauves, planted there against the parapet and finishing a cigar. The Count, who, he thought he made out, had an air of peculiar affability, offered him his white plump hand. Longmore stopped; he felt a sharp, a sore desire to cry out to him that he had the most precious wife in the world, that he ought to be ashamed of himself not to know it, and that for all his grand assurance he had never looked down into the depths of her eyes. Richard de Mauves, we have seen, considered he had; but there was doubtless now something in this young woman's eyes that had not been there five years before. The two men conversed formally enough, and M. de Mauves threw off a light bright remark or two about his visit to America. His tone was not soothing to Longmore's excited sensibilities. He seemed to have found the country a gigantic joke, and his blandness went but so far as to allow that jokes on that scale are indeed inexhaustible. Longmore was not by habit an aggressive apologist for the seat of his origin, but the Count's easy diagnosis confirmed his worst estimate of French superficiality. He had understood nothing, felt nothing, learned nothing, and his critic, glancing askance at his aristocratic profile, declared that if the chief merit of a long pedigree was to leave one so fatuously stupid he thanked goodness the Longmores had emerged from obscurity in the present century and in the person of an enterprising timber-merchant. M. de Mauves dwelt of course on that prime oddity of the American order--the liberty allowed the fairer half of the unmarried young, and confessed to some personal study of the "occasions" it offered to the speculative visitor; a line of research in which, during a fortnight's stay, he had clearly spent his most agreeable hours. "I'm bound to admit," he said, "that in every case I was disarmed by the extreme candour of the young lady, and that they took care of themselves to better purpose than I have seen some mammas in France take care of them." Longmore greeted this handsome concession with the grimmest of smiles and damned his impertinent patronage.

Mentioning, however, at last that he was about to leave Saint-Germain, he was surprised, without exactly being flattered, by his interlocutor's quickened attention. "I'm so very sorry; I hoped we had you for the whole summer." Longmore murmured something civil and wondered why M. de Mauves should care whether he stayed or went. "You've been a real resource to Madame de Mauves," the Count added; "I assure you I've mentally blessed your visits."

"They were a great pleasure to me," Longmore said gravely. "Some day I expect to come back."

"Pray do"--and the Count made a great and friendly point of it. "You see the confidence I have in you." Longmore said nothing and M. de Mauves puffed his cigar reflectively and watched the smoke. "Madame de Mauves," he said at last, "is a rather singular person." And then while our young man shifted his position and wondered whether he was going to "explain" Madame de Mauves, "Being, as you are, her fellow countryman," this lady's husband pursued, "I don't mind speaking frankly. She's a little overstrained; the most charming woman in the world, as you see, but a little volontaire and morbid. Now you see she has taken this extraordinary fancy for solitude. I can't get her to go anywhere, to see any one. When my friends present themselves she's perfectly polite, but it cures them of coming again. She doesn't do herself justice, and I expect every day to hear two or three of them say to me, 'Your wife's jolie a croquer: what a pity she hasn't a little esprit.' You must have found out that she has really a great deal. But, to tell the whole truth, what she needs is to forget herself. She sits alone for hours poring over her English books and looking at life through that terrible brown fog they seem to me--don't they?--to fling over the world. I doubt if your English authors," the Count went on with a serenity which Longmore afterwards characterised as sublime, "are very sound reading for young married women. I don't pretend to know much about them; but I remember that not long after our marriage

Madame de Mauves undertook to read me one day some passages from a certain Wordsworth--a poet highly esteemed, it appears, chez vous. It was as if she had taken me by the nape of the neck and held my head for half an hour over a basin of soupe aux choux: I felt as if we ought to ventilate the drawing-room before any one called. But I suppose you know him--ce genie-la. Every nation has its own ideals of every kind, but when I remember some of OUR charming writers! I think at all events my wife never forgave me and that it was a real shock to her to find she had married a man who had very much the same taste in literature as in cookery. But you're a man of general culture, a man of the world," said M. de Mauves, turning to Longmore but looking hard at the seal of his watchguard. "You can talk about everything, and I'm sure you like Alfred de Musset as well as Monsieur Wordsworth. Talk to her about everything you can, Alfred de Musset included. Bah! I forgot you're going. Come back then as soon as possible and report on your travels. If my wife too would make a little voyage it would do her great good. It would enlarge her horizon"--and M. de Mauves made a series of short nervous jerks with his stick in the air--"it would wake up her imagination. She's too much of one piece, you know--it would show her how much one may bend without breaking." He paused a moment and gave two or three vigorous puffs. Then turning to his companion again with eyebrows expressively raised: "I hope you admire my candour. I beg you to believe I wouldn't say such things to one of US!"

Evening was at hand and the lingering light seemed to charge the air with faintly golden motes. Longmore stood gazing at these luminous particles; he could almost have fancied them a swarm of humming insects, the chorus of a refrain: "She has a great deal of esprit--she has a great deal of esprit." "Yes,--she has a great deal," he said mechanically, turning to the Count. M. de Mauves glanced at him sharply, as if to ask what the deuce he was talking about. "She has a great deal of intelligence," said Longmore quietly, "a great deal of beauty, a great many virtues."

M. de Mauves busied himself for a moment in lighting another cigar, and when he had finished, with a return of his confidential smile, "I suspect you of thinking that I don't do my wife justice," he made answer. "Take care--take care, young man; that's a dangerous assumption. In general a man always does his wife justice. More than justice," the Count laughed--"that we keep for the wives of other men!"

Longmore afterwards remembered in favour of his friend's fine manner that he had not measured at this moment the dusky abyss over which it hovered. But a deepening subterranean echo, loudest at the last, lingered on his spiritual ear. For the present his keenest sensation was a desire to get away and cry aloud that M. de Mauves was no better than a pompous dunce. He bade him an abrupt good-night, which was to serve also, he said, as good-bye.

"Decidedly then you go?" It was spoken almost with the note of irritation.

"Decidedly."

"But of course you'll come and take leave--?" His manner implied that the omission would be uncivil, but there seemed to Longmore himself something so ludicrous in his taking a lesson in consideration from M. de Mauves that he put the appeal by with a laugh. The Count frowned as if it were a new and unpleasant sensation for him to be left at a loss. "Ah you people have your facons!" he murmured as Longmore turned away, not foreseeing that he should learn still more about his facons before he had done with him.

Longmore sat down to dinner at his hotel with his usual good intentions, but in the act of lifting his first glass of wine to his lips he suddenly fell to musing and set down the liquor untasted. This mood lasted long, and when he emerged from it his fish was cold; but that mattered little, for his appetite was gone. That evening he packed his trunk with an indignant energy. This was so effective that the operation was accomplished before bedtime, and as he was not in the least sleepy he devoted the interval to writing two letters, one of them a short note to Madame de Mauves, which he entrusted to a servant for delivery the next morning. He had found it best, he said, to leave Saint-Germain immediately, but he expected to return to Paris early in the autumn. The other letter was the result of his having remembered a day or two before that he had not yet complied with Mrs. Draper's injunction to give her an account of his impression of her friend. The present occasion seemed propitious, and he wrote half a dozen pages. His tone, however, was grave, and Mrs. Draper, on reading him over, was slightly disappointed--she would have preferred he should have "raved" a little more. But what chiefly concerns us is the concluding passage.

"The only time she ever spoke to me of her marriage," he wrote, "she intimated that it had been a perfect love-match. With all abatements, I suppose, this is what most marriages take themselves to be; but it would mean in her case, I think, more than in that of most women, for her love was an absolute idealisation. She believed her husband to be a hero of rose-coloured romance, and he turns out to be not even a hero of very sad-coloured reality. For some time now she has been sounding her mistake, but I don't believe she has yet touched the bottom. She strikes me as a person who's begging off from full knowledge--who has patched up a peace with some painful truth and is trying a while the experiment of living with closed eyes. In the dark she tries to see again the gilding on her idol. Illusion of course is illusion, and one must always pay for it; but there's something truly tragical in seeing an earthly penalty levied on such divine folly as this. As for M. de Mauves he's a shallow Frenchman to his fingers' ends, and I confess I should dislike him for this if he were a much better man. He can't forgive his wife for having married him too extravagantly and loved him too well; since he feels, I suppose, in some uncorrupted corner of his being that as she originally saw him so he ought to have been. It disagrees with him somewhere that a little American bourgeoisie should have fancied him a finer

fellow than he is or than he at all wants to be. He hasn't a glimmering of real acquaintance with his wife; he can't understand the stream of passion flowing so clear and still. To tell the truth I hardly understand it myself, but when I see the sight I find I greatly admire it. The Count at any rate would have enjoyed the comfort of believing his wife as bad a case as himself, and you'll hardly believe me when I assure you he goes about intimating to gentlemen whom he thinks it may concern that it would be a convenience to him they should make love to Madame de Mauves."

V

On reaching Paris Longmore straightaway purchased a Murray's "Belgium" to help himself to believe that he would start on the morrow for Brussels; but when the morrow came it occurred to him that he ought by way of preparation to acquaint himself more intimately with the Flemish painters in the Louvre. This took a whole morning, but it did little to hasten his departure. He had abruptly left Saint-Germain because it seemed to him that respect for Madame de Mauves required he should bequeath her husband no reason to suppose he had, as it were, taken a low hint; but now that he had deferred to that scruple he found himself thinking more and more ardently of his friend. It was a poor expression of ardour to be lingering irresolutely on the forsaken boulevard, but he detested the idea of leaving Saint-Germain five hundred miles behind him. He felt very foolish, nevertheless, and wandered about nervously, promising himself to take the next train. A dozen trains started, however, and he was still in Paris. This inward ache was more than he had bargained for, and as he looked at the shop-windows he wondered if it represented a "passion." He had never been fond of the word and had grown up with much mistrust of what it stood for. He had hoped that when he should fall "really" in love he should do it with an excellent conscience, with plenty of confidence and joy, doubtless, but no strange soreness, no pangs nor regrets. Here was a sentiment concocted of pity and anger as well as of admiration, and bristling with scruples and doubts and fears. He had come abroad to enjoy the Flemish painters and all others, but what fair-tressed saint of Van Eyck or Memling was so interesting a figure as the lonely lady of Saint-Germain? His restless steps carried him at last out of the long villa-bordered avenue which leads to the Bois de Boulogne.

Summer had fairly begun and the drive beside the lake was empty, but there were various loungers on the benches and chairs, and the great café had an air of animation. Longmore's walk had given him an appetite, and he went into the establishment and demanded a dinner, remarking for the hundredth time, as he admired the smart little tables disposed in the open air, how much better (than anywhere else) they ordered this matter in France. "Will monsieur dine in the garden or in the salon?" the waiter blandly asked. Longmore chose the garden and, observing that a great cluster of June roses was trained over the wall of the house, placed himself at a table near by, where the best of dinners was served him on the whitest of linen and in the most shining of porcelain. It so happened that his table was near a window and that as he sat he could look into a corner of the salon. So it was that his attention rested on a lady seated just within the window, which was open, face to face apparently with a companion who was concealed by the curtain. She was a very pretty woman, and Longmore looked at her as often as was consistent with good manners. After a while he even began to wonder who she was and finally to suspect that she was one of those ladies whom it is no breach of good manners to look at as often as you like. Our young man too, if he had been so disposed, would have been the more free to give her all his attention that her own was fixed upon the person facing her. She was what the French call a belle brune, and though Longmore, who had rather a conservative taste in such matters, was but half-charmed by her bold outlines and even braver complexion, he couldn't help admiring her expression of basking contentment.

She was evidently very happy, and her happiness gave her an air of innocence. The talk of her friend, whoever he was, abundantly suited her humour, for she sat listening to him with a broad idle smile and interrupting him fitfully, while she crunched her bonbons, with a murmured response, presumably as broad, which appeared to have the effect of launching him again. She drank a great deal of champagne and ate an immense number of strawberries, and was plainly altogether a person with an impartial relish for strawberries, champagne and what she doubtless would have called betises.

They had half-finished dinner when Longmore sat down, and he was still in his place when they rose. She had hung her bonnet on a nail above her chair, and her companion passed round the table to take it down for her. As he did so she bent her head to look at a wine-stain on her dress, and in the movement exposed the greater part of the back of a very handsome neck. The gentleman observed it, and observed also, apparently, that the room beyond them was empty; that he stood within eyeshot of Longmore he failed to observe. He stooped suddenly and imprinted a gallant kiss on the fair expanse. In the author of this tribute Longmore then recognised Richard de Mauves. The lady to whom it had been rendered put on her bonnet, using his flushed smile as a mirror, and in a moment they passed through the garden on their way to their carriage. Then for the first time M. de Mauves became aware of his wife's young friend. He measured with a rapid glance this spectator's relation to the open window and checked himself in the impulse to stop and speak to him. He contented himself with bowing all imperturbably as he opened the gate for his companion.

That evening Longmore made a railway journey, but not to Brussels. He had effectually ceased to care for Brussels; all he cared for in the world now was Madame de Mauves. The air of his mind had had a sudden clearing-up; pity and anger were still throbbing there, but they had space to range at their pleasure, for doubts and scruples had abruptly departed. It was little, he felt, that he could interpose between her resignation and the indignity of her position; but that little, if it involved the sacrifice of everything that bound him to the tranquil past, he could offer her with a rapture which at last made stiff resistance a terribly inferior substitute for faith. Nothing in his tranquil past had given such a zest to consciousness as this happy sense of choosing to go straight back to Saint-Germain. How to justify his return, how to explain his ardour, troubled him little. He wasn't even sure he wished to be understood; he wished only to show how little by any fault of his Madame de Mauves was alone so with the harshness of fate. He was conscious of no distinct desire to "make love" to her; if he could have uttered the essence of his longing he would have said that he wished her to remember that in a world coloured grey to her vision by the sense of her mistake there was one vividly honest man. She might certainly have remembered it, however, without his coming back to remind her; and it is not to be denied that as he waited for the morrow he longed immensely for the sound of her voice.

He waited the next day till his usual hour of calling--the late afternoon; but he learned at the door that the mistress of the house was not at home. The servant offered the information that she was walking a little way in the forest. Longmore went through the garden and out of the small door into the lane, and, after half an hour's vain exploration, saw her coming toward him at the end of a green by-path. As he appeared she stopped a moment, as if to turn aside; then recognising him she slowly advanced and had presently taken the hand he held out.

"Nothing has happened," she said with her beautiful eyes on him. "You're not ill?"

"Nothing except that when I got to Paris I found how fond I had grown of Saint-Germain."

She neither smiled nor looked flattered; it seemed indeed to Longmore that she took his reappearance with no pleasure. But he was uncertain, for he immediately noted that in his absence the whole character of her face had changed. It showed him something momentous had happened. It was no longer self-contained melancholy that he read in her eyes, but grief and agitation which had lately struggled with the passionate love of peace ruling her before all things else, and forced her to know that deep experience is never peaceful. She was pale and had evidently been shedding tears. He felt his heart beat hard--he seemed now to touch her secret. She continued to look at him with a clouded brow, as if his return had surrounded her with complications too great to be disguised by a colourless welcome. For some moments, as he turned and walked beside her, neither spoke; then abruptly, "Tell me truly, Mr. Longmore," she said, "why you've come back." He inclined himself to her, almost pulling up again, with an air that startled her into a certainty of what she had feared. "Because I've learned the real answer to the question I asked you the other day. You're not happy--you're too good to be happy on the terms offered you. Madame de Mauves," he went on with a gesture which protested against a gesture of her own, "I can't be happy, you know, when you're as little so as I make you out. I don't care for anything so long as I only feel helpless and sore about you. I found during those dreary days in Paris that the thing in life I most care for is this daily privilege of seeing you. I know it's very brutal to tell you I admire you; it's an insult to you to treat you as if you had complained to me or appealed to me. But such a friendship as I waked up to there"--and he tossed his head toward the distant city--"is a potent force, I assure you. When forces are stupidly stifled they explode. However," he went on, "if you had told me every trouble in your heart it would have mattered little; I couldn't say more than I--that if that in life from which you've hoped most has given you least, this devoted respect of mine will refuse no service and betray no trust."

She had begun to make marks in the earth with the point of her parasol, but she stopped and listened to him in perfect immobility--immobility save for the appearance by the time he had stopped speaking of a flush in her guarded clearness. Such as it was it told Longmore she was moved, and his first perceiving it was the happiest moment of his life. She raised her eyes at last, and they uttered a plea for non-insistence that unspeakably touched him.

"Thank you--thank you!" she said calmly enough; but the next moment her own emotion baffled this pretence, a convulsion shook her for ten seconds and she burst into tears. Her tears vanished as quickly as they came, but they did Longmore a world of good. He had always felt indefinitely afraid of her; her being had somehow seemed fed by a deeper faith and a stronger will than his own; but her half-dozen smothered sobs showed him the bottom of her heart and convinced him she was weak enough to be grateful. "Excuse me," she said; "I'm too nervous to listen to you. I believe I could have dealt with an enemy to-day, but I can't bear up under a friend."

"You're killing yourself with stoicism--that's what is the matter with you!" he cried. "Listen to a friend for his own sake if not for yours. I've never presumed to offer you an atom of compassion, and you can't accuse yourself of an abuse of charity."

She looked about her as under the constraint of this appeal, but it promised him a reluctant attention. Noting, however, by the wayside the fallen log on which they had rested a few evenings before, she went and sat down on it with a resigned grace while the young man, silent before her and watching her, took from her the mute assurance that if she was charitable now he must at least be very wise.

"Something came to my knowledge yesterday," he said as he sat down beside her, "which gave me an intense

impression of your loneliness. You're truth itself, and there's no truth about you. You believe in purity and duty and dignity, and you live in a world in which they're daily belied. I ask myself with vain rage how you ever came into such a world, and why the perversity of fate never let me know you before."

She waited a little; she looked down, straight before her. "I like my 'world' no better than you do, and it was not for its own sake I came into it. But what particular group of people is worth pinning one's faith upon? I confess it sometimes seems to me men and women are very poor creatures. I suppose I'm too romantic and always was. I've an unfortunate taste for poetic fitness. Life's hard prose, and one must learn to read prose contentedly. I believe I once supposed all the prose to be in America, which was very foolish. What I thought, what I believed, what I expected, when I was an ignorant girl fatally addicted to falling in love with my own theories, is more than I can begin to tell you now. Sometimes when I remember certain impulses, certain illusions of those days they take away my breath, and I wonder that my false point of view hasn't led me into troubles greater than any I've now to lament. I had a conviction which you'd probably smile at if I were to attempt to express it to you. It was a singular form for passionate faith to take, but it had all of the sweetness and the ardour of passionate faith. It led me to take a great step, and it lies behind me now, far off, a vague deceptive form melting in the light of experience. It has faded, but it hasn't vanished. Some feelings, I'm sure, die only with ourselves; some illusions are as much the condition of our life as our heart-beats. They say that life itself is an illusion--that this world is a shadow of which the reality is yet to come. Life is all of a piece then and there's no shame in being miserably human. As for my loneliness, it doesn't greatly matter; it is the fault in part of my obstinacy. There have been times when I've been frantically distressed and, to tell you the truth, wretchedly homesick, because my maid--a jewel of a maid--lied to me with every second breath. There have been moments when I've wished I was the daughter of a poor New England minister--living in a little white house under a couple of elms and doing all the housework."

She had begun to speak slowly, with reserve and effort; but she went on quickly and as if talk were at last a relief. "My marriage introduced me to people and things which seemed to me at first very strange and then very horrible, and then, to tell the truth, of very little importance. At first I expended a great deal of sorrow and dismay and pity on it all; but there soon came a time when I began to wonder if it were worth one's tears. If I could tell you the eternal friendships I've seen broken, the inconsolable woes consoled, the jealousies and vanities scrambling to outdo each other, you'd agree with me that tempers like yours and mine can understand neither such troubles nor such compensations. A year ago, while I was in the country, a friend of mine was in despair at the infidelity of her husband; she wrote me a most dolorous letter, and on my return to Paris I went immediately to see her. A week had elapsed, and as I had seen stranger things I thought she might have recovered her spirits. Not at all; she was still in despair--but at what? At the conduct, the abandoned, shameless conduct of--well of a lady I'll call Madame de T. You'll imagine of course that Madame de T. was the lady whom my friend's husband preferred to his wife. Far from it; he had never seen her. Who then was Madame de T.? Madame de T. was cruelly devoted to M. de V. And who was M. de V.? M. de V. was--well, in two words again, my friend was cultivating two jealousies at once. I hardly know what I said to her; something at any rate that she found unpardonable, for she quite gave me up. Shortly afterwards my husband proposed we should cease to live in Paris, and I gladly assented, for I believe I had taken a turn of spirits that made me a detestable companion. I should have preferred to go quite into the country, into Auvergne, where my husband has a house. But to him Paris in some degree is necessary, and Saint-Germain has been a conscious compromise."

"A conscious compromise!" Longmore expressively repeated. "That's your whole life."

"It's the life of many people," she made prompt answer--"of most people of quiet tastes, and it's certainly better than acute distress. One's at a loss theoretically to defend compromises; but if I found a poor creature who had managed to arrive at one I should think myself not urgently called to expose its weak side." But she had no sooner uttered these words than she laughed all amicably, as if to mitigate their too personal application.

"Heaven forbid one should do that unless one has something better to offer," Longmore returned. "And yet I'm haunted by the dream of a life in which you should have found no compromises, for they're a perversion of natures that tend only to goodness and rectitude. As I see it you should have found happiness serene, profound, complete; a *femme de chambre* not a jewel perhaps, but warranted to tell but one fib a day; a society possibly rather provincial, but--in spite of your poor opinion of mankind--a good deal of solid virtue; jealousies and vanities very tame, and no particular iniquities and adulteries. A husband," he added after a moment--"a husband of your own faith and race and spiritual substance, who would have loved you well."

She rose to her feet, shaking her head. "You're very kind to go to the expense of such dazzling visions for me. Visions are vain things; we must make the best of the reality we happen to be in for."

"And yet," said Longmore, provoked by what seemed the very wantonness of her patience, "the reality YOU happen to be in for' has, if I'm not in error, very recently taken a shape that keenly tests your philosophy."

She seemed on the point of replying that his sympathy was too zealous; but a couple of impatient tears in his eyes proved it founded on a devotion of which she mightn't make light. "Ah philosophy?" she echoed. "I HAVE none. Thank heaven," she cried with vehemence, "I have none! I believe, Mr. Longmore," she added in a moment, "that I've nothing on earth but a conscience--it's a good time to tell you so--nothing but a dogged obstinate clinging conscience."

Does that prove me to be indeed of your faith and race, and have you one yourself for which you can say as much? I don't speak in vanity, for I believe that if my conscience may prevent me from doing anything very base it will effectually prevent me also from doing anything very fine."

"I'm delighted to hear it," her friend returned with high emphasis--"that proves we're made for each other. It's very certain I too shall never cut a great romantic figure. And yet I've fancied that in my case the unaccommodating organ we speak of might be blinded and gagged a while, in a really good cause, if not turned out of doors. In yours," he went on with the same appealing irony, "is it absolutely beyond being 'squared'?"

But she made no concession to his tone. "Don't laugh at your conscience," she answered gravely; "that's the only blasphemy I know."

She had hardly spoken when she turned suddenly at an unexpected sound, and at the same moment he heard a footstep in an adjacent by-path which crossed their own at a short distance from where they stood.

"It's M. de Mauves," she said at once; with which she moved slowly forward. Longmore, wondering how she knew without seeing, had overtaken her by the time her husband came into view. A solitary walk in the forest was a pastime to which M. de Mauves was not addicted, but he seemed on this occasion to have resorted to it with some equanimity. He was smoking a fragrant cigar and had thrust his thumb into the armhole of his waistcoat with the air of a man thinking at his ease. He stopped short with surprise on seeing his wife and her companion, and his surprise had for Longmore even the pitch of impertinence. He glanced rapidly from one to the other, fixed the young man's own look sharply a single instant and then lifted his hat with formal politeness.

"I was not aware," he said, turning to Madame de Mauves, "that I might congratulate you on the return of monsieur."

"You should at once have known it," she immediately answered, "if I had expected such a pleasure."

She had turned very pale, and Longmore felt this to be a first meeting after some commotion. "My return was unexpected to myself," he said to her husband. "I came back last night."

M. de Mauves seemed to express such satisfaction as could consort with a limited interest. "It's needless for me to make you welcome. Madame de Mauves knows the duties of hospitality." And with another bow he continued his walk.

She pursued her homeward course with her friend, neither of them pretending much not to consent to appear silent. The Count's few moments with them had both chilled Longmore and angered him, casting a shadow across a prospect which had somehow, just before, begun to open and almost to brighten. He watched his companion narrowly as they went, and wondered what she had last had to suffer. Her husband's presence had checked her disposition to talk, though nothing betrayed she had recognised his making a point at her expense. Yet if matters were none the less plainly at a crisis between them he could but wonder vainly what it was on her part that prevented some practical protest or some rupture. What did she suspect?--how much did she know? To what was she resigned?--how much had she forgiven? How, above all, did she reconcile with knowledge, or with suspicion, that intense consideration she had just now all but assured him she entertained? "She has loved him once," Longmore said with a sinking of the heart, "and with her to love once is to commit herself for ever. Her clever husband thinks her too prim. What would a stupid poet call it?" He relapsed with aching impotence into the sense of her being somehow beyond him, unattainable, immeasurable by his own fretful logic. Suddenly he gave three passionate switches in the air with his cane which made Madame de Mauves look round. She could hardly have guessed their signifying that where ambition was so vain the next best thing to it was the very ardour of hopelessness.

She found in her drawing-room the little elderly Frenchman, M. de Chalumeau, whom Longmore had observed a few days before on the terrace. On this occasion too Madame Clairin was entertaining him, but as her sister-in-law came in she surrendered her post and addressed herself to our hero. Longmore, at thirty, was still an ingenuous youth, and there was something in this lady's large assured attack that fairly intimidated him. He was doubtless not as reassured as he ought to have been at finding he had not absolutely forfeited her favour by his want of resource during their last interview, and a suspicion of her being prepared to approach him on another line completed his distress.

"So you've returned from Brussels by way of the forest?" she archly asked.

"I've not been to Brussels. I returned yesterday from Paris by the only way--by the train."

Madame Clairin was infinitely struck. "I've never known a person at all to be so fond of Saint-Germain. They generally declare it's horribly dull."

"That's not very polite to you," said Longmore, vexed at his lack of superior form and determined not to be abashed.

"Ah what have I to do with it?" Madame Clairin brightly wailed. "I'm the dullest thing here. They've not had, other gentlemen, your success with my sister-in-law."

"It would have been very easy to have it. Madame de Mauves is kindness itself."

She swung open her great fan. "To her own countrymen!"

Longmore remained silent; he hated the tone of this conversation.

The speaker looked at him a little and then took in their hostess, to whom M. de Chalumeau was serving up another epigram, which the charming creature received with a droop of the head and eyes that strayed through the window. "Don't pretend to tell me," Madame Clairin suddenly exhaled, "that you're not in love with that pretty woman."

"Allons donc!" cried Longmore in the most inspired French he had ever uttered. He rose the next minute and took a hasty farewell.

VI

He allowed several days to pass without going back; it was of a sublime suitability to appear to regard his friend's frankness during their last interview as a general invitation. The sacrifice cost him a great effort, for hopeless passions are exactly not the most patient; and he had moreover a constant fear that if, as he believed, deep within the circle round which he could only hover, the hour of supreme explanations had come, the magic of her magnanimity might convert M. de Mauves. Vicious men, it was abundantly recorded, had been so converted as to be acceptable to God, and the something divine in this lady's composition would sanctify any means she should choose to employ. Her means, he kept repeating, were no business of his, and the essence of his admiration ought to be to allow her to do as she liked; but he felt as if he should turn away into a world out of which most of the joy had departed if she should like, after all, to see nothing more in his interest in her than might be repaid by mere current social coin.

When at last he went back he found to his vexation that he was to run the gauntlet of Madame Clairin's officious hospitality. It was one of the first mornings of perfect summer, and the drawing-room, through the open windows, was flooded with such a confusion of odours and bird-notes as might warrant the hope that Madame de Mauves would renew with him for an hour or two the exploration of the forest. Her sister-in-law, however, whose hair was not yet dressed, emerged like a brassy discord in a maze of melody. At the same moment the servant returned with his mistress's regrets; she begged to be excused, she was indisposed and unable to see Mr. Longmore. The young man knew just how disappointed he looked and just what Madame Clairin thought of it, and this consciousness determined in him an attitude of almost aggressive frigidity. This was apparently what she desired. She wished to throw him off his balance and, if she was not mistaken, knew exactly how.

"Put down your hat, Mr. Longmore," she said, "and be polite for once. You were not at all polite the other day when I asked you that friendly question about the state of your heart."

"I HAVE no heart--to talk about," he returned with as little grace.

"As well say you've none at all. I advise you to cultivate a little eloquence; you may have use for it. That was not an idle question of mine; I don't ask idle questions. For a couple of months now that you've been coming and going among us it seems to me you've had very few to answer of any sort."

"I've certainly been very well treated," he still dryly allowed.

His companion waited ever so little to bring out: "Have you never felt disposed to ask any?"

Her look, her tone, were so charged with insidious meanings as to make him feel that even to understand her would savour of dishonest complicity. "What is it you have to tell me?" he cried with a flushed frown.

Her own colour rose at the question. It's rather hard, when you come bearing yourself very much as the sibyl when she came to the Roman king, to be treated as something worse than a vulgar gossip. "I might tell you, monsieur," she returned, "that you've as bad a ton as any young man I ever met. Where have you lived--what are your ideas? A stupid one of my own--possibly!--has been to call your attention to a fact that it takes some delicacy to touch upon. You've noticed, I suppose, that my sister-in-law isn't the happiest woman in the world."

"Oh!"--Longmore made short work of it.

She seemed to measure his intelligence a little uncertainly. "You've formed, I suppose," she nevertheless continued, "your conception of the grounds of her discontent?"

"It hasn't required much forming. The grounds--or at least a specimen or two of them--have simply stared me in the face."

Madame Clairin considered a moment with her eyes on him. "Yes--ces choses-la se voient. My brother, in a single word, has the deplorable habit of falling in love with other women. I don't judge him; I don't judge my sister-in-law. I only permit myself to say that in her position I would have managed otherwise. I'd either have kept my husband's affection or I'd have frankly done without it. But my sister's an odd compound; I don't profess to understand her. Therefore it is, in a measure, that I appeal to you, her fellow countryman. Of course you'll be surprised at my way of looking at the matter, and I admit that it's a way in use only among people whose history--that of a race--has cultivated

in them the sense for high political solutions." She paused and Longmore wondered where the history of her race was going to lead her. But she clearly saw her course. "There has never been a galant homme among us, I fear, who has not given his wife, even when she was very charming, the right to be jealous. We know our history for ages back, and the fact's established. It's not a very edifying one if you like, but it's something to have scandals with pedigrees--if you can't have them with attenuations. Our men have been Frenchmen of France, and their wives--I may say it--have been of no meaner blood. You may see all their portraits at our poor charming old house--every one of them an 'injured' beauty, but not one of them hanging her head. Not one of them ever had the bad taste to be jealous, and yet not one in a dozen ever consented to an indiscretion--allowed herself, I mean, to be talked about. *Voilà comme elles ont su s'arranger*. How they did it--go and look at the dusky faded canvases and pastels and ask. They were dear brave women of wit. When they had a headache they put on a little rouge and came to supper as usual, and when they had a heart-ache they touched up that quarter with just such another brush. These are great traditions and charming precedents, I hold, and it doesn't seem to me fair that a little American bourgeoisie should come in and pretend to alter them--all to hang her modern photograph and her obstinate little air penche in the gallery of our shrewd great-grandmothers. She should fall into line, she should keep up the tone. When she married my brother I don't suppose she took him for a member of a *societe de bonnes oeuvres*. I don't say we're right; who IS right? But we are as history has made us, and if any one's to change it had better be our charming, but not accommodating, friend." Again Madame Clairin paused, again she opened and closed her great modern fan, which clattered like the screen of a shop-window. "Let her keep up the tone!" she prodigiously repeated.

Longmore felt himself gape, but he gasped an "Ah!" to cover it. Madame Clairin's dip into the family annals had apparently imparted an honest zeal to her indignation. "For a long time," she continued, "my belle-soeur has been taking the attitude of an injured woman, affecting a disgust with the world and shutting herself up to read free-thinking books. I've never permitted myself, you may believe, the least observation on her conduct, but I can't accept it as the last word either of taste or of tact. When a woman with her prettiness lets her husband stray away she deserves no small part of her fate. I don't wish you to agree with me--on the contrary; but I call such a woman a pure noodle. She must have bored him to death. What has passed between them for many months needn't concern us; what provocation my sister has had--monstrous, if you wish--what ennui my brother has suffered. It's enough that a week ago, just after you had ostensibly gone to Brussels, something happened to produce an explosion. She found a letter in his pocket, a photograph, a trinket, *que sais-je*? At any rate there was a grand scene. I didn't listen at the keyhole, and I don't know what was said; but I've reason to believe that my poor brother was hauled over the coals as I fancy none of his ancestors have ever been--even by angry ladies who weren't their wives."

Longmore had leaned forward in silent attention with his elbows on his knees, and now, impulsively, he dropped his face into his hands. "Ah poor poor woman!"

"*Voilà!*" said Madame Clairin. "You pity her."

"Pity her?" cried Longmore, looking up with ardent eyes and forgetting the spirit of the story to which he had been treated in the miserable facts. "Don't you?"

"A little. But I'm not acting sentimentally--I'm acting scientifically. We've always been capable of ideas. I want to arrange things; to see my brother free to do as he chooses; to see his wife contented. Do you understand me?"

"Very well, I think," the young man said. "You're the most immoral person I've lately had the privilege of conversing with."

Madame Clairin took it calmly. "Possibly. When was ever a great peacemaker not immoral?"

"Ah no," Longmore protested. "You're too superficial to be a great peacemaker. You don't begin to know anything about Madame de Mauves."

She inclined her head to one side while her fine eyes kept her visitor in view; she mused a moment and then smiled as with a certain compassionate patience. "It's not in my interest to contradict you."

"It would be in your interest to learn, madam" he resolutely returned, "what honest men most admire in a woman--and to recognise it when you see it."

She was wonderful--she waited a moment. "So you ARE in love!" she then effectively brought out.

For a moment he thought of getting up, but he decided to stay. "I wonder if you'd understand me," he said at last, "if I were to tell you that I have for Madame de Mauves the most devoted and most respectful friendship?"

"You underrate my intelligence. But in that case you ought to exert your influence to put an end to these painful domestic scenes."

"Do you imagine she talks to me about her domestic scenes?" Longmore cried.

His companion stared. "Then your friendship isn't returned?" And as he but ambiguously threw up his hands, "Now, at least," she added, "she'll have something to tell you. I happen to know the upshot of my brother's last interview with his wife." Longmore rose to his feet as a protest against the indelicacy of the position into which he had been drawn; but all that made him tender made him curious, and she caught in his averted eyes an expression that prompted her to

strike her blow. "My brother's absurdly entangled with a certain person in Paris; of course he ought not to be, but he wouldn't be my brother if he weren't. It was this irregular passion that dictated his words. 'Listen to me, madam,' he cried at last; 'let us live like people who understand life! It's unpleasant to be forced to say such things outright, but you've a way of bringing one down to the rudiments. I'm faithless, I'm heartless, I'm brutal, I'm everything horrible--it's understood. Take your revenge, console yourself: you're too charming a woman to have anything to complain of. Here's a handsome young man sighing himself into a consumption for you. Listen to your poor compatriot and you'll find that virtue's none the less becoming for being good-natured. You'll see that it's not after all such a doleful world and that there's even an advantage in having the most impudent of husbands.'" Madame Clairin paused; Longmore had turned very pale. "You may believe it," she amazingly pursued; "the speech took place in my presence; things were done in order. And now, monsieur"--this with a wondrous strained grimace which he was too troubled at the moment to appreciate, but which he remembered later with a kind of awe--"we count on you!"

"Her husband said this to her face to face, as you say it to me now?" he asked after a silence.

"Word for word and with the most perfect politeness."

"And Madame de Mauves--what did she say?"

Madame Clairin smiled again. "To such a speech as that a woman says--nothing. She had been sitting with a piece of needlework, and I think she hadn't seen Richard since their quarrel the day before. He came in with the gravity of an ambassador, and I'm sure that when he made his *demande en mariage* his manner wasn't more respectful. He only wanted white gloves!" said Longmore's friend. "My *belle-soeur* sat silent a few moments, drawing her stitches, and then without a word, without a glance, walked out of the room. It was just what she SHOULD have done!"

"Yes," the young man repeated, "it was just what she should have done."

"And I, left alone with my brother, do you know what I said?"

Longmore shook his head.

"*Mauvals sujet!*" he suggested.

"You've done me the honour," I said, 'to take this step in my presence. I don't pretend to qualify it. You know what you're about, and it's your own affair. But you may confide in my discretion.' Do you think he has had reason to complain of it?" She received no answer; her visitor had slowly averted himself; he passed his gloves mechanically round the band of his hat. "I hope," she cried, "you're not going to start for Brussels!"

Plainly he was much disturbed, and Madame Clairin might congratulate herself on the success of her plea for old-fashioned manners. And yet there was something that left her more puzzled than satisfied in the colourless tone with which he answered, "No, I shall remain here for the present." The processes of his mind were unsociably private, and she could have fancied for a moment that he was linked with their difficult friend in some monstrous conspiracy of asceticism.

"Come this evening," she nevertheless bravely resumed. "The rest will take care of itself. Meanwhile I shall take the liberty of telling my sister-in-law that I've repeated--in short, that I've put you *au fait*"

He had a start but he controlled himself, speaking quietly enough. "Tell her what you please. Nothing you can tell her will affect her conduct."

"*Voyons!* Do you mean to tell me that a woman young, pretty, sentimental, neglected, wronged if you will--? I see you don't believe it. Believe simply in your own opportunity!" she went on. "But for heaven's sake, if it is to lead anywhere, don't come back with that *visage de croquemort*. You look as if you were going to bury your heart--not to offer it to a pretty woman. You're much better when you smile--you're very nice then. Come, do yourself justice."

He remained a moment face to face with her, but his expression didn't change. "I shall do myself justice," he however after an instant made answer; and abruptly, with a bow, he took his departure.

VII

He felt, when he found himself unobserved and outside, that he must plunge into violent action, walk fast and far and defer the opportunity for thought. He strode away into the forest, swinging his cane, throwing back his head, casting his eyes into verdurous vistas and following the road without a purpose. He felt immensely excited, but could have given no straight name to his agitation. It was a joy as all increase of freedom is joyous; something seemed to have been cleared out of his path and his destiny to have rounded a cape and brought him into sight of an open sea. But it was a pain in the degree in which his freedom somehow resolved itself into the need of despising all mankind with a single exception; and the fact that Madame de Mauves inhabited a planet contaminated by the presence of the baser multitude kept elation from seeming a pledge of ideal bliss.

There she was, at any rate, and circumstances now forced them to be intimate. She had ceased to have what men call a secret for him, and this fact itself brought with it a sort of rapture. He had no prevision that he should "profit," in the vulgar sense, by the extraordinary position into which they had been thrown; it might be but a cruel trick of destiny to make hope a harsher mockery and renunciation a keener suffering. But above all this rose the conviction that she could do nothing that wouldn't quicken his attachment. It was this conviction that gross accident--all odious in itself--would force the beauty of her character into more perfect relief for him that made him stride along as if he were celebrating a spiritual feast. He rambled at hazard for a couple of hours, finding at last that he had left the forest behind him and had wandered into an unfamiliar region. It was a perfectly rural scene, and the still summer day gave it a charm for which its meagre elements but half accounted.

He thought he had never seen anything so characteristically French; all the French novels seemed to have described it, all the French landscapists to have painted it. The fields and trees were of a cool metallic green; the grass looked as if it might stain his trousers and the foliage his hands. The clear light had a mild greyness, the sheen of silver, not of gold, was in the work-a-day sun. A great red-roofed high-stacked farmhouse, with whitewashed walls and a straggling yard, surveyed the highroad, on one side, from behind a transparent curtain of poplars. A narrow stream half-choked with emerald rushes and edged with grey aspens occupied the opposite quarter. The meadows rolled and sloped away gently to the low horizon, which was barely concealed by the continuous line of clipped and marshalled trees. The prospect was not rich, but had a frank homeliness that touched the young man's fancy. It was full of light atmosphere and diffused clearness, and if it was prosaic it was somehow sociable.

Longmore was disposed to walk further, and he advanced along the road beneath the poplars. In twenty minutes he came to a village which straggled away to the right, among orchards and potagers. On the left, at a stone's throw from the road, stood a little pink-faced inn which reminded him that he had not breakfasted, having left home with a prevision of hospitality from Madame de Mauves. In the inn he found a brick-tiled parlour and a hostess in sabots and a white cap, whom, over the omelette she speedily served him--borrowing licence from the bottle of sound red wine that accompanied it--he assured she was a true artist. To reward his compliment she invited him to smoke his cigar in her little garden behind the house.

Here he found a tonnelle and a view of tinted crops stretching down to the stream. The tonnelle was rather close, and he preferred to lounge on a bench against the pink wall, in the sun, which was not too hot. Here, as he rested and gazed and mused, he fell into a train of thought which, in an indefinable fashion, was a soft influence from the scene about him. His heart, which had been beating fast for the past three hours, gradually checked its pulses and left him looking at life with rather a more level gaze. The friendly tavern sounds coming out through the open windows, the sunny stillness of the yellowing grain which covered so much vigorous natural life, conveyed no strained nor high-pitched message, had little to say about renunciation--nothing at all about spiritual zeal. They communicated the sense of plain ripe nature, expressed the unperverted reality of things, declared that the common lot isn't brilliantly amusing and that the part of wisdom is to grasp frankly at experience lest you miss it altogether. What reason there was for his beginning to wonder after this whether a deeply-wounded heart might be soothed and healed by such a scene, it would be difficult to explain; certain it was that as he sat there he dreamt, awake, of an unhappy woman who strolled by the slow-flowing stream before him and who pulled down the fruit-laden boughs in the orchards. He mused and mused, and at last found himself quite angry that he couldn't somehow think worse of Madame de Mauves--or at any rate think otherwise. He could fairly claim that in the romantic way he asked very little of life--made modest demands on passion: why then should his only passion be born to ill fortune? Why should his first--his last--glimpse of positive happiness be so indissolubly linked with renunciation?

It is perhaps because, like many spirits of the same stock, he had in his composition a lurking principle of sacrifice, sacrifice for sacrifice's sake, to the authority of which he had ever paid due deference, that he now felt all the vehemence of rebellion. To renounce, to renounce again, to renounce for ever, was this all that youth and longing and ardour were meant for? Was experience to be muffled and mutilated like an indecent picture? Was a man to sit and deliberately condemn his future to be the blank memory of a regret rather than the long possession of a treasure? Sacrifice? The word was a trap for minds muddled by fear, an ignoble refuge of weakness. To insist now seemed not to dare, but simply to BE, to live on possible terms.

His hostess came out to hang a moist cloth on the hedge, and, though her guest was sitting quietly enough, she might have imagined in his kindled eyes a flattering testimony to the quality of her wine. As she turned back into the house she was met by a young man of whom Longmore took note in spite of his high distraction. He was evidently a member of that jovial fraternity of artists whose very shabbiness has an affinity with the unestablished and unexpected in life--the element often gazed at with a certain wistfulness out of the curtained windows even of the highest respectability. Longmore was struck first with his looking like a very clever man and then with his looking like a contented one. The combination, as it was expressed in his face, might have arrested the attention of a less exasperated reasoner. He had a slouched hat and a yellow beard, a light easel under one arm, and an unfinished sketch in oils under the other. He stopped and stood talking for some moments to the landlady, while something pleasant played in his face. They were discussing the possibilities of dinner; the hostess enumerated some very savoury ones, and he nodded

briskly, assenting to everything. It couldn't be, Longmore thought, that he found such ideal ease in the prospect of lamb-chops and spinach and a croute aux fruits. When the dinner had been ordered he turned up his sketch, and the good woman fell to admiring and comparing, to picking up, off by the stream-side, the objects represented.

Was it his work, Longmore wondered, that made him so happy? Was a strong talent the best thing in the world? The landlady went back to her kitchen, and the young painter stood, as if he were waiting for something, beside the gate which opened upon the path across the fields. Longmore sat brooding and asking himself if it weren't probably better to cultivate the arts than to cultivate the passions. Before he had answered the question the painter had grown tired of waiting. He had picked up a pebble, tossed it lightly into an upper window and called familiarly "Claudine!" Claudine appeared; Longmore heard her at the window, bidding the young man cultivate patience. "But I'm losing my light," he said; "I must have my shadows in the same place as yesterday."

"Go without me then," Claudine answered; "I'll join you in ten minutes." Her voice was fresh and young; it represented almost aggressively to Longmore that she was as pleased as her companion.

"Don't forget the Chenier," cried the young man, who, turning away, passed out of the gate and followed the path across the fields until he disappeared among the trees by the side of the stream. Who might Claudine be? Longmore vaguely wondered; and was she as pretty as her voice? Before long he had a chance to satisfy himself; she came out of the house with her hat and parasol, prepared to follow her companion. She had on a pink muslin dress and a little white hat, and she was as pretty as suffices almost any Frenchwoman to be pleasing. She had a clear brown skin and a bright dark eye and a step that made walking as light a matter as being blown--and this even though she happened to be at the moment not a little over-weighted. Her hands were encumbered with various articles involved in her pursuit of her friend. In one arm she held her parasol and a large roll of needlework, and in the other a shawl and a heavy white umbrella, such as painters use for sketching. Meanwhile she was trying to thrust into her pocket a paper-covered volume which Longmore saw to be the poems of Andre Chenier, and in the effort dropping the large umbrella and marking this with a half-smiled exclamation of disgust. Longmore stepped forward and picked up the umbrella, and as she, protesting her gratitude, put out her hand to take it, he recognised her as too obliging to the young man who had preceded her.

"You've too much to carry," he said; "you must let me help you."

"You're very good, monsieur," she answered. "My husband always forgets something. He can do nothing without his umbrella. He is d'une etourderie--"

"You must allow me to carry the umbrella," Longmore risked; "there's too much of it for a lady."

She assented, after many compliments to his politeness; and he walked by her side into the meadow. She went lightly and rapidly, picking her steps and glancing forward to catch a glimpse of her husband. She was graceful, she was charming, she had an air of decision and yet of accommodation, and it seemed to our friend that a young artist would work none the worse for having her seated at his side reading Chenier's iambs. They were newly married, he supposed, and evidently their path of life had none of the mocking crookedness of some others. They asked little; but what need to ask more than such quiet summer days by a shady stream, with a comrade all amiability, to say nothing of art and books and a wide unmenaced horizon? To spend such a morning, to stroll back to dinner in the red-tiled parlour of the inn, to ramble away again as the sun got low--all this was a vision of delight which floated before him only to torture him with a sense of the impossible. All Frenchwomen were not coquettes, he noted as he kept pace with his companion. She uttered a word now and then for politeness' sake, but she never looked at him and seemed not in the least to care that he was a well-favoured and well-dressed young man. She cared for nothing but the young artist in the shabby coat and the slouched hat, and for discovering where he had set up his easel.

This was soon done. He was encamped under the trees, close to the stream, and, in the diffused green shade of the little wood, couldn't have felt immediate need of his umbrella. He received a free rebuke, however, for forgetting it, and was informed of what he owed to Longmore's complaisance. He was duly grateful; he thanked our hero warmly and offered him a seat on the grass. But Longmore felt himself a marplot and lingered only long enough to glance at the young man's sketch and to see in it an easy rendering of the silvery stream and the vivid green rushes. The young wife had spread her shawl on the grass at the base of a tree and meant to seat herself when he had left them, meant to murmur Chenier's verses to the music of the gurgling river. Longmore looked a while from one of these lucky persons to the other, barely stifled a sigh, bade them good-morning and took his departure. He knew neither where to go nor what to do; he seemed afloat on the sea of ineffectual longing. He strolled slowly back to the inn, where, in the doorway, he met the landlady returning from the butcher's with the lambchops for the dinner of her lodgers.

"Monsieur has made the acquaintance of the dame of our young painter," she said with a free smile--a smile too free for malicious meanings. "Monsieur has perhaps seen the young man's picture. It appears that he's d'une jolie force."

"His picture's very charming," said Longmore, "but his dame is more charming still."

"She's a very nice little woman; but I pity her all the more."

"I don't see why she's to be pitied," Longmore pleaded. "They seem a very happy couple."

The landlady gave a knowing nod. "Don't trust to it, monsieur! Those artists--ca na pas de principes! From one day to another he can plant her there! I know them, allez. I've had them here very often; one year with one, another year with another."

Longmore was at first puzzled. Then, "You mean she's not his wife?" he asked.

She took it responsibly. "What shall I tell you? They're not des hommes serieux, those gentlemen! They don't engage for eternity. It's none of my business, and I've no wish to speak ill of madame. She's gentille--but gentille, and she loves her jeune homme to distraction."

"Who then is so distinguished a young woman?" asked Longmore. "What do you know about her?"

"Nothing for certain; but it's my belief that she's better than he. I've even gone so far as to believe that she's a lady--a vraie dame--and that she has given up a great many things for him. I do the best I can for them, but I don't believe she has had all her life to put up with a dinner of two courses." And she turned over her lamb-chops tenderly, as to say that though a good cook could imagine better things, yet if you could have but one course lamb-chops had much in their favour. "I shall do them with breadcrumbs. Voilà les femmes, monsieur!"

Longmore turned away with the feeling that women were indeed a measureless mystery, and that it was hard to say in which of their forms of perversity there was most merit. He walked back to Saint-Germain more slowly than he had come, with less philosophic resignation to any event and more of the urgent egotism of the passion pronounced by philosophers the supremely selfish one. Now and then the episode of the happy young painter and the charming woman who had given up a great many things for him rose vividly in his mind and seemed to mock his moral unrest like some obtrusive vision of unattainable bliss.

The landlady's gossip had cast no shadow on its brightness; her voice seemed that of the vulgar chorus of the uninitiated, which stands always ready with its gross prose rendering of the inspired passages of human action. Was it possible a man could take THAT from a woman--take all that lent lightness to that other woman's footstep and grace to her surrender and not give her the absolute certainty of a devotion as unalterable as the process of the sun? Was it possible that so clear a harmony had the seeds of trouble, that the charm of so perfect union could be broken by anything but death? Longmore felt an immense desire to cry out a thousand times "No!" for it seemed to him at last that he was somehow only a graver equivalent of the young lover and that rustling Claudine was a lighter sketch of Madame de Mauves. The heat of the sun, as he walked along, became oppressive, and when he re-entered the forest he turned aside into the deepest shade he could find and stretched himself on the mossy ground at the foot of a great beech. He lay for a while staring up into the verdurous dusk overhead and trying mentally to see his friend at Saint-Germain hurry toward some quiet stream-side where HE waited, as he had seen that trusting creature hurry an hour before. It would be hard to say how well he succeeded; but the effort soothed rather than excited him, and as he had had a good deal both of moral and physical fatigue he sank at last into a quiet sleep. While he slept moreover he had a strange and vivid dream. He seemed to be in a wood, very much like the one on which his eyes had lately closed; but the wood was divided by the murmuring stream he had left an hour before. He was walking up and down, he thought, restlessly and in intense expectation of some momentous event. Suddenly, at a distance, through the trees, he saw a gleam of a woman's dress, on which he hastened to meet her. As he advanced he recognised her, but he saw at the same time that she was on the other bank of the river. She seemed at first not to notice him, but when they had come to opposite places she stopped and looked at him very gravely and pityingly. She made him no sign that he must cross the stream, but he wished unutterably to stand by her side. He knew the water was deep, and it seemed to him he knew how he should have to breast it and how he feared that when he rose to the surface she would have disappeared. Nevertheless he was going to plunge when a boat turned into the current from above and came swiftly toward them, guided by an oarsman who was sitting so that they couldn't see his face. He brought the boat to the bank where Longmore stood; the latter stepped in, and with a few strokes they touched the opposite shore. Longmore got out and, though he was sure he had crossed the stream, Madame de Mauves was not there. He turned with a kind of agony and saw that now she was on the other bank--the one he had left. She gave him a grave silent glance and walked away up the stream. The boat and the boatman resumed their course, but after going a short distance they stopped and the boatman turned back and looked at the still divided couple. Then Longmore recognised him--just as he had recognised him a few days before at the restaurant in the Bois de Boulogne.

VIII

He must have slept some time after he ceased dreaming for he had no immediate memory of this vision. It came back to him later, after he had roused himself and had walked nearly home. No great arrangement was needed to make it seem a striking allegory, and it haunted and oppressed him for the rest of the day. He took refuge, however, in his quickened

conviction that the only sound policy in life is to grasp unsparingly at happiness; and it seemed no more than one of the vigorous measures dictated by such a policy to return that evening to Madame de Mauves. And yet when he had decided to do so and had carefully dressed himself he felt an irresistible nervous tremor which made it easier to linger at his open window, wondering with a strange mixture of dread and desire whether Madame Clairin had repeated to her sister-in-law what she had said to him. His presence now might be simply a gratuitous annoyance, and yet his absence might seem to imply that it was in the power of circumstances to make them ashamed to meet each other's eyes. He sat a long time with his head in his hands, lost in a painful confusion of hopes and ambiguities. He felt at moments as if he could throttle Madame Clairin, and yet couldn't help asking himself if it weren't possible she had done him a service. It was late when he left the hotel, and as he entered the gate of the other house his heart beat so fast that he was sure his voice would show it.

The servant ushered him into the drawing-room, which was empty and with the lamp burning low. But the long windows were open and their light curtains swaying in a soft warm wind, so that Longmore immediately stepped out upon the terrace. There he found Madame de Mauves alone, slowly pacing its length. She was dressed in white, very simply, and her hair was arranged not as she usually wore it, but in a single loose coil and as if she were unprepared for company. She stopped when she saw her friend, showed some surprise, uttered an exclamation and stood waiting for him to speak. He tried, with his eyes on her, to say something, but found no words. He knew it was awkward, it was offensive, to stand gazing at her; but he couldn't say what was suitable and mightn't say what he wished. Her face was indistinct in the dim light, but he felt her eyes fixed on him and wondered what they expressed. Did they warn him, did they plead, or did they confess to a sense of provocation? For an instant his head swam; he was sure it would make all things clear to stride forward and fold her in his arms. But a moment later he was still dumb there before her; he hadn't moved; he knew she had spoken, but he hadn't understood.

"You were here this morning," she continued; and now, slowly, the meaning of her words came to him. "I had a bad headache and had to shut myself up." She spoke with her usual voice.

Longmore mastered his agitation and answered her without betraying himself. "I hope you're better now."

"Yes, thank you, I'm better--much better."

He waited again and she moved away to a chair and seated herself. After a pause he followed her and leaned closer to her, against the balustrade of the terrace. "I hoped you might have been able to come out for the morning into the forest. I went alone; it was a lovely day, and I took a long walk."

"It was a lovely day," she said absently, and sat with her eyes lowered, slowly opening and closing her fan. Longmore, as he watched her, felt more and more assured her sister-in-law had seen her since her interview with him; that her attitude toward him was changed. It was this same something that hampered the desire with which he had come, or at least converted all his imagined freedom of speech about it to a final hush of wonder. No, certainly, he couldn't clasp her to his arms now, any more than some antique worshipper could have clasped the marble statue in his temple. But Longmore's statue spoke at last with a full human voice and even with a shade of human hesitation. She looked up, and it seemed to him her eyes shone through the dusk.

"I'm very glad you came this evening--and I've a particular reason for being glad. I half-expected you, and yet I thought it possible you mightn't come."

"As the case has been present to me," Longmore answered, "it was impossible I shouldn't come. I've spent every minute of the day in thinking of you."

She made no immediate reply, but continued to open and close her fan thoughtfully. At last, "I've something important to say to you," she resumed with decision. "I want you to know to a certainty that I've a very high opinion of you." Longmore gave an uneasy shift to his position. To what was she coming? But he said nothing, and she went on: "I take a great interest in you. There's no reason why I shouldn't say it. I feel a great friendship for you." He began to laugh, all awkwardly--he hardly knew why, unless because this seemed the very irony of detachment. But she went on in her way: "You know, I suppose, that a great disappointment always implies a great confidence--a great hope."

"I've certainly hoped," he said, "hoped strongly; but doubtless never rationally enough to have a right to bemoan my disappointment."

There was something troubled in her face that seemed all the while to burn clearer. "You do yourself injustice. I've such confidence in your fairness of mind that I should be greatly disappointed if I were to find it wanting."

"I really almost believe you're amusing yourself at my expense," the young man cried. "My fairness of mind? Of all the question-begging terms!" he laughed. "The only thing for one's mind to be fair to is the thing one FEELS!"

She rose to her feet and looked at him hard. His eyes by this time were accustomed to the imperfect light, and he could see that if she was urgent she was yet beseechingly kind. She shook her head impatiently and came near enough to lay her fan on his arm with a strong pressure. "If that were so it would be a weary world. I know enough, however, of your probable attitude. You needn't try to express it. It's enough that your sincerity gives me the right to ask a favour of you--to make an intense, a solemn request."

"Make it; I listen."

"DON'T DISAPPOINT ME. If you don't understand me now you will to-morrow or very soon. When I said just now that I had a high opinion of you, you see I meant it very seriously," she explained. "It wasn't a vain compliment. I believe there's no appeal one may make to your generosity that can remain long unanswered. If this were to happen--if I were to find you selfish where I thought you generous, narrow where I thought you large"--and she spoke slowly, her voice lingering with all emphasis on each of these words--"vulgar where I thought you rare, I should think worse of human nature. I should take it, I assure you, very hard indeed. I should say to myself in the dull days of the future: 'There was ONE man who might have done so and so, and he too failed.' But this shan't be. You've made too good an impression on me not to make the very best. If you wish to please me for ever there's a way."

She was standing close to him, with her dress touching him, her eyes fixed on his. As she went on her tone became, to his sense, extraordinary, and she offered the odd spectacle of a beautiful woman preaching reason with the most communicative and irresistible passion. Longmore was dazzled, but mystified and bewildered. The intention of her words was all remonstrance, refusal, dismissal, but her presence and effect there, so close, so urgent, so personal, a distracting contradiction of it. She had never been so lovely. In her white dress, with her pale face and deeply-lighted brow, she seemed the very spirit of the summer night. When she had ceased speaking she drew a long breath; he felt it on his cheek, and it stirred in his whole being a sudden perverse imagination. Were not her words, in their high impossible rigour, a mere challenge to his sincerity, a mere precaution of her pride, meant to throw into relief her almost ghostly beauty, and wasn't this the only truth, the only law, the only thing to take account of?

He closed his eyes and felt her watch him not without pain and perplexity herself. He looked at her again, met her own eyes and saw them fill with strange tears. Then this last sophistry of his great desire for her knew itself touched as a bubble is pricked; it died away with a stifled murmur, and her beauty, more and more radiant in the darkness, rose before him as a symbol of something vague which was yet more beautiful than itself. "I may understand you to-morrow," he said, "but I don't understand you now."

"And yet I took counsel with myself to-day and asked myself how I had best speak to you. On one side I might have refused to see you at all." Longmore made a violent movement, and she added: "In that case I should have written to you. I might see you, I thought, and simply say to you that there were excellent reasons why we should part, and that I begged this visit should be your last. This I inclined to do; what made me decide otherwise was--well, simply that I like you so. I said to myself that I should be glad to remember in future days, not that I had, in the horrible phrase, got rid of you, but that you had gone away out of the fulness of your own wisdom and the excellence of your own taste."

"Ah wisdom and taste!" the poor young man wailed.

"I'm prepared, if necessary," Madame de Mauves continued after a pause, "to fall back on my strict right. But, as I said before, I shall be greatly disappointed if I'm obliged to do that."

"When I listen to your horrible and unnatural lucidity," Longmore answered, "I feel so angry, so merely sore and sick, that I wonder I don't leave you without more words."

"If you should go away in anger this idea of mine about our parting would be but half-realised," she returned with no drop in her ardour. "No, I don't want to think of you as feeling a great pain, I don't want even to think of you as making a great sacrifice. I want to think of you--"

"As a stupid brute who has never existed, who never CAN exist!" he broke in. "A creature who could know you without loving you, who could leave you without for ever missing you!"

She turned impatiently away and walked to the other end of the terrace. When she came back he saw that her impatience had grown sharp and almost hard. She stood before him again, looking at him from head to foot and without consideration now; so that as the effect of it he felt his assurance finally quite sink. This then she took from him, withholding in consequence something she had meant to say. She moved off afresh, walked to the other end of the terrace and stood there with her face to the garden. She assumed that he understood her, and slowly, slowly, half as the fruit of this mute pressure, he let everything go but the rage of a purpose somehow still to please her. She was giving him a chance to do gallantly what it seemed unworthy of both of them he should do meanly. She must have "liked" him indeed, as she said, to wish so to spare him, to go to the trouble of conceiving an ideal of conduct for him. With this sense of her tenderness still in her dreadful consistency, his spirit rose with a new flight and suddenly felt itself breathe clearer air. Her profession ceased to seem a mere bribe to his eagerness; it was charged with eagerness itself; it was a present reward and would somehow last. He moved rapidly toward her as with the sense of a gage that he might sublimely yet immediately enjoy.

They were separated by two thirds of the length of the terrace, and he had to pass the drawing-room window. As he did so he started with an exclamation. Madame Clairin stood framed in the opening as if, though just arriving on the scene, she too were already aware of its interest. Conscious, apparently, that she might be suspected of having watched them she stepped forward with a smile and looked from one to the other. "Such a tete-a-tete as that one owes no apology for interrupting. One ought to come in for good manners."

Madame de Mauves turned to her, but answered nothing. She looked straight at Longmore, and her eyes shone with a lustre that struck him as divine. He was not exactly sure indeed what she meant them to say, but it translated itself to something that would do. "Call it what you will, what you've wanted to urge upon me is the thing this woman can best conceive. What I ask of you is something she can't begin to!" They seemed somehow to beg him to suffer her to be triumphantly herself, and to intimate--yet this too all decently--how little that self was of Madame Clairin's particular swelling measure. He felt an immense answering desire not to do anything then that might seem probable or prevu to this lady. He had laid his hat and stick on the parapet of the terrace. He took them up, offered his hand to Madame de Mauves with a simple good-night, bowed silently to Madame Clairin and found his way, with tingling ears, out of the place.

IX

He went home and, without lighting his candle, flung himself on his bed. But he got no sleep till morning; he lay hour after hour tossing, thinking, wondering; his mind had never been so active. It seemed to him his friend had laid on him in those last moments a heavy charge and had expressed herself almost as handsomely as if she had listened complacently to an assurance of his love. It was neither easy nor delightful thoroughly to understand her; but little by little her perfect meaning sank into his mind and soothed it with a sense of opportunity which somehow stifled his sense of loss. For, to begin with, she meant that she could love him in no degree or contingency, in no imaginable future. This was absolute--he knew he could no more alter it than he could pull down one of the constellations he lay gazing at through his open window. He wondered to what it was, in the background of her life, she had so dedicated herself. A conception of duty unquenchable to the end? A love that no outrage could stifle? "Great heaven!" he groaned; "is the world so rich in the purest pearls of passion that such tenderness as that can be wasted for ever--poured away without a sigh into bottomless darkness?" Had she, in spite of the detestable present, some precious memory that still kept the door of possibility open? Was she prepared to submit to everything and yet to believe? Was it strength, was it weakness, was it a vulgar fear, was it conviction, conscience, constancy?

Longmore sank back with a sigh and an oppressive feeling that it was vain to guess at such a woman's motives. He only felt that those of this one were buried deep in her soul and that they must be of the noblest, must contain nothing base. He had his hard impression that endless constancy was all her law--a constancy that still found a foothold among crumbling ruins. "She has loved once," he said to himself as he rose and wandered to his window; "and that's for ever. Yes, yes--if she loved again she'd be COMMON!" He stood for a long time looking out into the starlit silence of the town and forest and thinking of what life would have been if his constancy had met her own in earlier days. But life was this now, and he must live. It was living, really, to stand there with such a faith even in one's self still flung over one by such hands. He was not to disappoint her, he was to justify a conception it had beguiled her weariness to form. His imagination embraced it; he threw back his head and seemed to be looking for his friend's conception among the blinking mocking stars. But it came to him rather on the mild night-wind wandering in over the house-tops which covered the rest of so many heavy human hearts. What she asked he seemed to feel her ask not for her own sake--she feared nothing, she needed nothing--but for that of his own happiness and his own character. He must assent to destiny. Why else was he young and strong, intelligent and resolute? He mustn't give it to her to reproach him with thinking she had had a moment's attention for his love, give it to her to plead, to argue, to break off in bitterness. He must see everything from above, her indifference and his own ardour; he must prove his strength, must do the handsome thing, must decide that the handsome thing was to submit to the inevitable, to be supremely delicate, to spare her all pain, to stifle his passion, to ask no compensation, to depart without waiting and to try to believe that wisdom is its own reward. All this, neither more nor less, it was a matter of beautiful friendship with him for her to expect of him. And what should he himself gain by it? He should have pleased her! Well, he flung himself on his bed again, fell asleep at last and slept till morning.

Before noon next day he had made up his mind to leave Saint-Germain at once. It seemed easiest to go without seeing her, and yet if he might ask for a grain of "compensation" this would be five minutes face to face with her. He passed a restless day. Wherever he went he saw her stand before him in the dusky halo of evening, saw her look at him with an air of still negation more intoxicating than the most passionate self-surrender. He must certainly go, and yet it was hideously hard. He compromised and went to Paris to spend the rest of the day. He strolled along the boulevard and paused sightlessly before the shops, sat a while in the Tuileries gardens and looked at the shabby unfortunates for whom this only was nature and summer; but simply felt afresh, as a result of it all, the dusty dreary lonely world to which Madame de Mauves had consigned him.

In a sombre mood he made his way back to the centre of motion and sat down at a table before a cafe door, on the great plain of hot asphalt. Night arrived, the lamps were lighted, the tables near him found occupants, and Paris began

to wear that evening grimace of hers that seems to tell, in the flare of plate glass and of theatre-doors, the muffled rumble of swift-rolling carriages, how this is no world for you unless you have your pockets lined and your delicacies perverted. Longmore, however, had neither scruples nor desires; he looked at the great preoccupied place for the first time with an easy sense of repaying its indifference. Before long a carriage drove up to the pavement directly in front of him and remained standing for several minutes without sign from its occupant. It was one of those neat plain coupes, drawn by a single powerful horse, in which the flaneur figures a pale handsome woman buried among silk cushions and yawning as she sees the gas-lamps glittering in the gutters. At last the door opened and out stepped Richard de Mauves. He stopped and leaned on the window for some time, talking in an excited manner to a person within. At last he gave a nod and the carriage rolled away. He stood swinging his cane and looking up and down the boulevard, with the air of a man fumbling, as one might say, the loose change of time. He turned toward the cafe and was apparently, for want of anything better worth his attention, about to seat himself at one of the tables when he noticed Longmore. He wavered an instant and then, without a shade of difference in his careless gait, advanced to the accompaniment of a thin recognition. It was the first time they had met since their encounter in the forest after Longmore's false start for Brussels. Madame Clairin's revelations, as he might have regarded them, had not made the Count especially present to his mind; he had had another call to meet than the call of disgust. But now, as M. de Mauves came toward him he felt abhorrence well up. He made out, however, for the first time, a cloud on this nobleman's superior clearness, and a delight at finding the shoe somewhere at last pinching HIM, mingled with the resolve to be blank and unaccommodating, enabled him to meet the occasion with due promptness.

M. de Mauves sat down, and the two men looked at each other across the table, exchanging formal remarks that did little to lend grace to their encounter. Longmore had no reason to suppose the Count knew of his sister's various interventions. He was sure M. de Mauves cared very little about his opinions, and yet he had a sense of something grim in his own New York face which would have made him change colour if keener suspicion had helped it to be read there. M. de Mauves didn't change colour, but he looked at his wife's so oddly, so more than naturally (wouldn't it be?) detached friend with an intentness that betrayed at once an irritating memory of the episode in the Bois de Boulogne and such vigilant curiosity as was natural to a gentleman who had entrusted his "honour" to another gentleman's magnanimity--or to his artlessness.

It might appear that these virtues shone out of our young man less engagingly or reassuringly than a few days before; the shadow at any rate fell darker across the brow of his critic, who turned away and frowned while lighting a cigar. The person in the coupe, he accordingly judged, whether or no the same person as the heroine of the episode of the Bois de Boulogne, was not a source of unalloyed delight. Longmore had dark blue eyes of admirable clarity, settled truth-telling eyes which had in his childhood always made his harshest taskmasters smile at his notion of a subterfuge. An observer watching the two men and knowing something of their relations would certainly have said that what he had at last both to recognise and to miss in those eyes must not a little have puzzled and tormented M. de Mauves. They took possession of him, they laid him out, they measured him in that state of flatness, they triumphed over him, they treated him as no pair of eyes had perhaps ever treated any member of his family before. The Count's scheme had been to provide for a positive state of ease on the part of no one save himself, but here was Longmore already, if appearances perhaps not appreciable to the vulgar meant anything, primed as for some prospect of pleasure more than Parisian. Was this candid young barbarian but a faux bonhomme after all? He had never really quite satisfied his occasional host, but was he now, for a climax, to leave him almost gaping?

M. de Mauves, as if hating to seem preoccupied, took up the evening paper to help himself to seem indifferent. As he glanced over it he threw off some perfunctory allusion to the crisis--the political--which enabled Longmore to reply with perfect veracity that, with other things to think about, he had had no attention to spare for it. And yet our hero was in truth far from secure against rueful reflexion. The Count's ruffled state was a comfort so far as it pointed to the possibility that the lady in the coupe might be proving too many for him; but it ministered to no vindictive sweetness for Longmore so far as it should perhaps represent rising jealousy. It passed through his mind that jealousy is a passion with a double face and that on one of its sides it may sometimes almost look generous. It glimmered upon him odiously M. de Mauves might grow ashamed of his political compact with his wife, and he felt how far more tolerable it would be in future to think of him as always impertinent than to think of him as occasionally contrite. The two men pretended meanwhile for half an hour to outsit each other conveniently; and the end--at that rate--might have been distant had not the tension in some degree yielded to the arrival of a friend of M. de Mauves--a tall pale consumptive-looking dandy who filled the air with the odour of heliotrope. He looked up and down the boulevard wearily, examined the Count's garments in some detail, then appeared to refer restlessly to his own, and at last announced resignedly that the Duchess was in town. M. de Mauves must come with him to call; she had abused him dreadfully a couple of evenings before--a sure sign she wanted to see him. "I depend on you," said with an infantine drawl this specimen of an order Longmore felt he had never had occasion so intimately to appreciate, "to put her en train."

M. de Mauves resisted, he protested that he was d'une humeur massacrate; but at last he allowed himself to be drawn to his feet and stood looking awkwardly--awkwardly for M. de Mauves--at Longmore. "You'll excuse me," he appeared to find some difficulty in saying; "you too probably have occupation for the evening?"

"None but to catch my train." And our friend looked at his watch.

"Ah you go back to Saint-Germain?"

"In half an hour."

M. de Mauves seemed on the point of disengaging himself from his companion's arm, which was locked in his own; but on the latter's uttering some persuasive murmur he lifted his hat stiffly and turned away.

Longmore the next day wandered off to the terrace to try and beguile the restlessness with which he waited for the evening; he wished to see Madame de Mauves for the last time at the hour of long shadows and pale reflected amber lights, as he had almost always seen her. Destiny, however, took no account of this humble plea for poetic justice; it was appointed him to meet her seated by the great walk under a tree and alone. The hour made the place almost empty; the day was warm, but as he took his place beside her a light breeze stirred the leafy edges of their broad circle of shadow. She looked at him almost with no pretence of not having believed herself already rid of him, and he at once told her that he should leave Saint-Germain that evening, but must first bid her farewell. Her face lighted a moment, he fancied, as he spoke; but she said nothing, only turning it off to far Paris which lay twinkling and flashing through hot exhalations. "I've a request to make of you," he added. "That you think of me as a man who has felt much and claimed little."

She drew a long breath which almost suggested pain. "I can't think of you as unhappy. That's impossible. You've a life to lead, you've duties, talents, inspirations, interests. I shall hear of your career. And then," she pursued after a pause, though as if it had before this quite been settled between them, "one can't be unhappy through having a better opinion of a friend instead of a worse."

For a moment he failed to understand her. "Do you mean that there can be varying degrees in my opinion of you?"

She rose and pushed away her chair. "I mean," she said quickly, "that it's better to have done nothing in bitterness--nothing in passion." And she began to walk.

Longmore followed her without answering at first. But he took off his hat and with his pocket-handkerchief wiped his forehead. "Where shall you go? what shall you do?" he simply asked at last.

"Do? I shall do as I've always done--except perhaps that I shall go for a while to my husband's old home."

"I shall go to MY old one. I've done with Europe for the present," the young man added.

She glanced at him as he walked beside her, after he had spoken these words, and then bent her eyes for a long time on the ground. But suddenly, as if aware of her going too far she stopped and put out her hand. "Good-bye. May you have all the happiness you deserve!"

He took her hand with his eyes on her, but something was at work in him that made it impossible to deal in the easy way with her touch. Something of infinite value was floating past him, and he had taken an oath, with which any such case interfered, not to raise a finger to stop it. It was borne by the strong current of the world's great life and not of his own small one. Madame de Mauves disengaged herself, gathered in her long scarf and smiled at him almost as you would do at a child you should wish to encourage. Several moments later he was still there watching her leave him and leave him. When she was out of sight he shook himself, walked at once back to his hotel and, without waiting for the evening train, paid his bill and departed.

Later in the day M. de Mauves came into his wife's drawing-room, where she sat waiting to be summoned to dinner. He had dressed as he usually didn't dress for dining at home. He walked up and down for some moments in silence, then rang the bell for a servant and went out into the hall to meet him. He ordered the carriage to take him to the station, paused a moment with his hand on the knob of the door, dismissed the servant angrily as the latter lingered observing him, re-entered the drawing-room, resumed his restless walk and at last stopped abruptly before his wife, who had taken up a book. "May I ask the favour," he said with evident effort, in spite of a forced smile as of allusion to a large past exercise of the very best taste, "of having a question answered?"

"It's a favour I never refused," she replied.

"Very true. Do you expect this evening a visit from Mr. Longmore?"

"Mr. Longmore," said his wife, "has left Saint-Germain." M. de Mauves waited, but his smile expired. "Mr. Longmore," his wife continued, "has gone to America."

M. de Mauves took it--a rare thing for him--with confessed, if momentary, intellectual indignance. But he raised, as it were, the wind. "Has anything happened?" he asked, "Had he a sudden call?" But his question received no answer. At the same moment the servant threw open the door and announced dinner; Madame Clairin rustled in, rubbing her white hands, Madame de Mauves passed silently into the dining-room, but he remained outside--outside of more things, clearly, than his mere *salle-a-manger*. Before long he went forth to the terrace and continued his uneasy walk. At the end of a quarter of an hour the servant came to let him know that his carriage was at the door. "Send it away," he said without hesitation. "I shan't use it." When the ladies had half-finished dinner he returned and joined them, with a formal apology to his wife for his inconsequence.

The dishes were brought back, but he hardly tasted them; he drank on the other hand more wine than usual. There was little talk, scarcely a convivial sound save the occasional expressive appreciative "M-m-m!" of Madame Clairin over the succulence of some dish. Twice this lady saw her brother's eyes, fixed on her own over his wineglass, put to her a question she knew she should have to irritate him later on by not being able to answer. She replied, for the present at least, by an elevation of the eyebrows that resembled even to her own humour the vain raising of an umbrella in anticipation of a storm. M. de Mauves was left alone to finish his wine; he sat over it for more than an hour and let the darkness gather about him. At last the servant came in with a letter and lighted a candle. The letter was a telegram, which M. de Mauves, when he had read it, burnt at the candle. After five minutes' meditation he wrote a message on the back of a visiting-card and gave it to the servant to carry to the office. The man knew quite as much as his master suspected about the lady to whom the telegram was addressed; but its contents puzzled him; they consisted of the single word "Impossible." As the evening passed without her brother's reappearing in the drawing-room Madame Clairin came to him where he sat by his solitary candle. He took no notice of her presence for some time, but this affected her as unexpected indulgence. At last, however, he spoke with a particular harshness. "Ce jeune mufler has gone home at an hour's notice. What the devil does it mean?"

Madame Clairin now felt thankful for her umbrella. "It means that I've a sister-in-law whom I've not the honour to understand."

He said nothing more and silently allowed her, after a little, to depart. It had been her duty to provide him with an explanation, and he was disgusted with her blankness; but she was--if there was no more to come--getting off easily. When she had gone he went into the garden and walked up and down with his cigar. He saw his wife seated alone on the terrace, but remained below, wandering, turning, pausing, lingering. He remained a long time. It grew late and Madame de Mauves disappeared. Toward midnight he dropped upon a bench, tired, with a long vague exhalation of unrest. It was sinking into his spirit that he too didn't understand Madame Clairin's sister-in-law.

Longmore was obliged to wait a week in London for a ship. It was very hot, and he went out one day to Richmond. In the garden of the hotel at which he dined he met his friend Mrs. Draper, who was staying there. She made eager enquiry about Madame de Mauves; but Longmore at first, as they sat looking out at the famous view of the Thames, parried her questions and confined himself to other topics. At last she said she was afraid he had something to conceal; whereupon, after a pause, he asked her if she remembered recommending him, in the letter she had addressed him at Saint-Germain, to draw the sadness from her friend's smile. "The last I saw of her was her smile," he said--"when I bade her good-bye."

"I remember urging you to 'console' her," Mrs. Draper returned, "and I wondered afterwards whether--model of discretion as you are--I hadn't cut you out work for which you wouldn't thank me."

"She has her consolation in herself," the young man said; "she needs none that any one else can offer her. That's for troubles for which--be it more, be it less--our own folly has to answer. Madame de Mauves hasn't a grain of folly left."

"Ah don't say that!"--Mrs. Draper knowingly protested. "Just a little folly's often very graceful."

Longmore rose to go--she somehow annoyed him. "Don't talk of grace," he said, "till you've measured her reason!"

For two years after his return to America he heard nothing of Madame de Mauves. That he thought of her intently, constantly, I need hardly say; most people wondered why such a clever young man shouldn't "devote" himself to something; but to himself he seemed absorbingly occupied. He never wrote to her; he believed she wouldn't have "liked" it. At last he heard that Mrs. Draper had come home and he immediately called on her. "Of course," she said after the first greetings, "you're dying for news of Madame de Mauves. Prepare yourself for something strange. I heard from her two or three times during the year after your seeing her. She left Saint-Germain and went to live in the country on some old property of her husband's. She wrote me very kind little notes, but I felt somehow that--in spite of what you said about 'consolation'--they were the notes of a wretched woman. The only advice I could have given her was to leave her scamp of a husband and come back to her own land and her own people. But this I didn't feel free to do, and yet it made me so miserable not to be able to help her that I preferred to let our correspondence die a natural death. I had no news of her for a year. Last summer, however, I met at Vichy a clever young Frenchman whom I accidentally learned to be a friend of that charming sister of the Count's, Madame Clairin. I lost no time in asking him what he knew about Madame de Mauves--a countrywoman of mine and an old friend. 'I congratulate you on the friendship of such a person,' he answered. 'That's the terrible little woman who killed her husband.' You may imagine I promptly asked for an explanation, and he told me--from his point of view--what he called the whole story. M. de Mauves had fait quelques folies which his wife had taken absurdly to heart. He had repented and asked her forgiveness, which she had inexorably refused. She was very pretty, and severity must have suited her style; for, whether or no her husband had been in love with her before, he fell madly in love with her now. He was the proudest man in France, but he had begged her on his knees to be re-admitted to favour. All in vain! She was stone, she was ice, she was outraged virtue. People noticed a great change in him; he gave up society, ceased to care for anything, looked shockingly. One fine day they discovered he had blown out his brains. My friend had the story of course from Madame Clairin."

Longmore was strongly moved, and his first impulse after he had recovered his composure was to return immediately

to Europe. But several years have passed, and he still lingers at home. The truth is that, in the midst of all the ardent tenderness of his memory of Madame de Mauves, he has become conscious of a singular feeling--a feeling of wonder, of uncertainty, of awe.