

FICTION

Anne Douglas Sedgwick

The Rescue

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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BY

Anne Douglas Sedgwick
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"THE DULL MISS ARCHINARD"



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TO
G. S. S.
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M. D. S.

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T H E R E S C U E



I

EUSTACE DAMIER bent his long, melancholy profile over the photograph-album. It was an old-fashioned album; its faded morocco cover, its gilt clasp loosened with age, went with the quiet old-fashioned little room, that had no intentions, made no efforts, and yet was full of meaning, with the charm of an epoch near enough to be easily understood, yet with a grace and a pathos in its modern antiquity deeper than that possessed by a more romantic remoteness. It was the sort of little drawing-room where one's mother might have accepted one's father: one could not quite see one's present in it, but one saw a near and a dear past. The gray wall-paper with its flecked gold flower, the curved lines of the sedately ornamental chairs and sofas, the crisp yet faded chintzes, the wedded vases on the marble mantelpiece, the books, well worn, on stands, the group of family silhouettes on the wall, the cheerful floral carpet--all made a picture curiously unlike the early nineties, and fully characteristic of the sixties. There were many flowers about the room, arranged with a cheerful regularity; the very roses looked old-fashioned in their closely grouped bunches; and in a corner stood a tall etagere bearing potted plants in rows that narrowed to an apex. Between curtains, carefully drawn, of white lace and green rep, one saw a strip of garden brilliantly illuminated with sunlight.


It was in just such a room and in such surroundings that Damier had imagined seeing again his old friend, and his mother's friend, Mrs. Mostyn. He always associated her with a sprightly conservatism. With a genial, yet detached, appreciation of modern taste, she would be placidly faithful to the taste of her girlhood. The house, he remembered, had been her mother's, and its contents had probably remained as they were when her mother's death put her in possession of it. He remembered Mrs. Mostyn's caps, her cameos, her rings, her bracelet with the plaited hair in it, her jests, too, and her gaieties--all with a perfume of potpourri, with a niceness and exactitude of simile that had not attempted to keep pace with the complexities, the allusiveness and elusiveness, of modern humor.

Mrs. Mostyn had lived for many years in this small country house; she had entered it as a childless widow after a life of some color and movement, her husband having been a promising diplomat, whose death in early middle age had cut short a career that had not yet found an opportunity of rising from promise to any large achievement. After his death Mrs. Mostyn devoted herself to books, to her garden, her poor people, and her friends. Her house was not adapted to a large hospitality, but one of these friends was usually with her. Damier, however, was only paying a call. He had never visited Mrs. Mostyn; she had visited his mother in London, and since his mother had died he had been little in England. Now he was staying with the Halbournes, eight miles away.

The atmosphere of the room, as he waited, the stillness of the warm, fragrant garden outside, combined to make a half-tender, half-melancholy mood, in which an impression, quickly felt, is long remembered. Such an impression awaited him in the old photograph-album. It had been natural to see there his mother's gentle, thoughtful face--first of a round-cheeked girl, looking like a Thackeray heroine, and, later, the face he knew so well, fatigued, sad, yet smiling under gray hair; natural to see his father, with dreaming eyes and the fine head of the thinker; to see aunts and uncles, his dead sister, and himself: but it was with the half-painful, half-joyous shock of something wholly unfamiliar, wholly arresting, strongly significant, that he came upon the photograph of an unknown lady. It was a faded carte-de-visite, and the small lettering on the cardboard edge spoke of Paris and of some bygone photographer. The lady was

portrayed in a conventional pose and without modern accessories, leaning one arm in its sleeve of flowing silk on the back of a high chair, a hand hanging, half hidden, against the folds of her silken skirt. She was dressed after the fashion of the late sixties, in that of the Second Empire; yet, though her dress spoke of France, as the photograph had done, and spoke charmingly, her face was not that of a French-woman. One's first impression--not too superficial, either--was of a finished little *mondaine*; but finished, poised, serene as she was, she could not be more than twenty--indeed, as Damier reflected, youth at that time was not a lengthy epoch, as in ours. She was slender, the leaning bust and arm rounded, the hand long. Her face was heart-shaped; the dark hair, parted over the forehead and drawn up fully from the brows, emphasized the width across the eyes, the narrowness of the face below; the lips were firm and delicate. Of her eyes one saw chiefly the gaze and the darkness under a sweep of straight eyebrow. And Damier had passed at once through these surface impressions to an essential one: her head was the most enchanting he had ever seen, and her eyes, as they looked at him, had a message for him. Man of the modern world as he was, he stood looking back at this dim, enchanting face; stood trying to interpret its message over the chasm made by more than two decades; stood wondering what she meant to him. He was wrapped in this sensation--of a spell woven about him, of an outstretching from the past, of something mysterious and urgent--when Mrs. Mostyn came in.

II

RS. MOSTYN had changed little since he had last seen her five years ago in London. Her hair, under the laces of her cap, was whiter; her rosiness and plumpness--her little hands were especially fat--more accentuated: but the gaiety and kindness were the same. As much as in the past she entered into all his interests: asked questions about his three years at the English embassy in Rome, about his recent travels, what he had done, what he intended to do. When all reminiscences were over, all plans discussed, and when Mrs. Mostyn had sketched for him, with her crisp, nipping definitiveness, the people of the neighborhood, Damier, who during all the talk had kept the album in his hand, his forefinger between the leaves at the place where the enchanted photograph had looked at him, said, opening the book: "I have been immersing myself in the past. Is anything so full of its feeling as an old photograph-album? *Ca sent le temps*, and I have made a discovery there. Who is this?" He held out the opened page to her, and Mrs. Mostyn, adjusting her eye-glasses, looked.

"Ah, yes. Is she not charming?"

"She has charmed me. She is wonderful."

"Her story was certainly rather wonderful. And she always charmed me, too, though I knew her only slightly, and saw her for only a short time. I met her in Paris when I was there with my husband. She was a Miss Chanfrey--Clara Chanfrey, a younger branch of the Bectons, you know. Clara had come out in London the year before. Lady Chanfrey, an ambitious woman, had, I fancy, determined on a brilliant match for her, and it seemed about to be realized, for Lord Pemleigh followed them to Paris, where Clara's beauty made a furor--she was thought lovelier than the Empress. As I remember her there was really no comparison; she was far lovelier. I can see her now: one night at the Tuileries--she wore a white gauze dress and lilies-of-the-valley in her hair; and at the opera, Lord Pemleigh in the box, a hard, impassive man, but he was, report said, desperately enamoured; and, again, riding in the Bois in the flowing habit of the time. There was an air of serious blitheness about her; yet under the blitheness I felt always an eagerness, a waiting. She always seemed to be waiting, and to smile and talk *pour passer le temps*--to make the something that was coming come more quickly. Poor child! it came."

"She married Lord Pemleigh?" Damier asked, as Mrs. Mostyn paused, her eyes vague with memories.

"No; don't you remember? He married little Ethel Dunstan--but only after years had passed. No; she did an extraordinary thing--a dreadful thing. She eloped--ran away with a French artist, a man of no family, no fortune. He was introduced to the Chanfreys in Paris, and painted Clara's portrait. Very clever it was thought, rather in the style of Manet; a full-length portrait--I saw it--of Clara in a white lawn dress with a green ribbon around her waist and a green ribbon in her black hair, and at her throat an emerald locket. Perhaps his very difference charmed her, and the distance that separated his world from hers made her unable to see him clearly; he was, too, extremely handsome. No explanations are needed of why he fell in love; the wealth and the position he hoped through her to attain were sufficient reasons, to say nothing of her beauty. At all events, Clara proudly avowed that they loved each other. One can only imagine the storm. The Chanfreys took her back to England; he followed them; and she ran away with him and married him. Her family never forgave her. Her father and mother died without ever seeing her again, and she refused the small allowance they offered her. Since those days I have heard only vaguely of her, and heard only unhappy things. The man, Jules Vicaud, was a talented brute. With her all had been glamour, charm, romance, the sense of generous trust; with him calculation and selfishness. He treated her abominably when he found that he had gained nothing with her; and he was idle, extravagant, dissipated. They became terribly poor. It was a sordid, a horrible story;--a violet dragged in the mud."

Damier had listened in silence; now, as Mrs. Mostyn handed him back the album, and as, once more, the steady

gaze met his, "I cannot associate her with the gutter," he said, "nor can I understand this violet stooping to it. I should have imagined her too fastidious, too intelligent, and, if you will, too conventional to be for one moment dazzled by a shoddy bohemian."

"Oh," sighed Mrs. Mostyn, "has delicacy ever been a certificate of safety? She was fastidious, she was intelligent, she was conventional; but she was also idealistic, impulsive, ignorant--far more ignorant than a modern girl would be. Her knowledge of any other world than her own was so vague that the very carefulness of her breeding made her unconscious of its lack in others; differences she would have thought significant only of his greatness and her own littleness. She dazzled herself more than he dazzled her, perhaps. And he was, then at least, more than the shoddy bohemian. He had grace, power,--I well remember him,--an apparent indifference to the more petty standards and tests of her world that no doubt seemed to her a splendid, courageous unworldliness. And then he came at a moment of rebellion, pain, and perplexity, as a contrast to the formality, the charmlessness of her English suitor. She did not love Lord Pemleigh; her resistance to the match had already embittered her relations with her mother--Lady Chanfrey was a high-spirited, clever, cynical woman. And then--and then--she fell in love with Jules Vicaud; that is, after all, the only final explanation of these stories."

"And she ceased to love him?" He seemed now to interpret the gaze more fully. Did it not foresee? Did it not entreat--though so proudly?

"Ah, I don't know. All I know is that she stuck to him, and that she was miserable. Poor, poor child!" Mrs. Mostyn repeated.

"And is she dead?" he asked after a little pause in which it seemed to him that they had thrown flowers on a long-forgotten grave.

Mrs. Mostyn looked out of the window at the summer sky and sunny garden, the effort of difficult recollection on her face.

"I really don't know--I really can't remember. So soon afterward my husband died; Lady Chanfrey died; I came here to live. I heard from time to time of her misfortunes--of her death I don't think I heard; but for years now I have heard nothing. How many years ago is it? This is '95, and that was--oh, it must have been nearly twenty-eight years ago."

"So that she would be now?"

"She would be forty-seven now. If she is alive the story of her life is over."

"I wonder if it is. I wonder if she is alive."

The gaze of the photograph, with all its calm, grew more profound, more significant.

"Could you find out?" he asked presently.

Mrs. Mostyn broke into a laugh that, with its cheery common sense, like a gay cockcrow announcing dawn, seemed to dispel the hallucinations of night, recall the reality of the present, and set them both firmly in their own epoch.

"My dear Eustace! What a dabbler in impressions you are! I won't say dabbler--seeker-after."

"Not after impressions," said Damier, smiling a little sadly.

"And have you not found anything?" she asked.

"No; I don't think I have."

"Neither a religion, nor a work, nor a woman!" smiled Mrs. Mostyn. "You have always reminded me, Eustace, of that introspective Swiss gentleman of the journal. You are always seeking something to which you can give yourself unreservedly. But my sad little Clara, even if she would have meant something to you, came too early. She missed you by--how many years?--fifteen at least, Eustace; you were hardly more than a baby when that photograph was taken. But she may have had a daughter,--the daughter of the bohemian and the mondaine,--and you might find there an adventure of the heart."

"Ah, I don't care about a daughter--or about an adventure."

Mrs. Mostyn glanced at his absorbed, delicate face with a smile baffled and quizzical. She controlled, however, any humorous queries, and said presently:

"Yes, I might try to find out. I might write to Mrs. Gaston; she knows Sir Molyneux Chanfrey, Clara's brother,--a man I never liked,--and she could ask him."

"Pray do."

"But I don't fancy Sir Molyneux is very easy to approach on the subject. He and his sister were never sympathetic."

"I wish you would find out," Damier repeated.

"I will, Eustace, and give you a letter of introduction to her if I ever find her," smiled Mrs. Mostyn.

III

EUSTACE DAMIER was susceptible and fastidious, idealistic and skeptical. He was not weak, for he rarely yielded to his impressions; but his strength, since nothing had come into his life that called for decisive action, was mainly negative. Perfection haunted him, and seen beside that inner standard, most experience was tawdry. He was quite incapable of loving what he had if he could not have what he loved. The vacancy had once been filled, but since his mother's, his sister's death, it had yawned, oppressive, unresponsive, about him. He was no cynic, but he was melancholy. He had gone through life alternating between ardor and despondency.

He was amused now, amused and yet amazed, by the extraordinary impression that the old photograph had made upon him. More than once he had drawn back on the verge of a great passion,—drawn back he could hardly have said why,—feeling that the woman, or he himself, lacked something of the qualities that could make them lastingly need each other. And now it really seemed to him that he needed, and would need lastingly, this woman of thirty years ago; and surely she needed him. She called to him, and he answered. He understood her; he loved her.

It was whimsical, absurd, pathetic. He could smile over it, yet under the smile some deeper self seemed to smile another smile—the smile of a mystery speaking at last in words that he could not understand, but in a voice that he could hear.

Mrs. Mostyn had yielded the photograph to his determined claim,—laughing at his impudence,—and he kept it always beside him in the weeks that followed his departure from ---shire. During those weeks, that lengthened into months, no news came, and the eagerness of his feeling died away. The feeling was still there, but it was like an awakened and living memory of an old, dead love. He thought of her as dead; it was best so, for he could imagine with repulsion the degradation that a hurried life in the slimier walks of bohemia might have wrought in her had she lived. The sense of half-humorous, half-tragic pathos remained with him. He smiled at the photograph every day. It represented just what a memory, deep and still, would have represented. It said to him, "We have found each other. Now we will never part." And absurdly, deliciously, he felt—with an instinct that fluttered wings high above any net of reason, singing, almost invisible—that what he had missed was waiting for him somewhere.

ONE day in late autumn, when he had returned to London, something happened which changed the character of this unsubstantial romance. He met at his club another old friend, a contemporary of Mrs. Mostyn's. Sir Henry Quarle was a writer of pleasant reminiscences, a garrulous and companionable man about town, who had kept careful pace with the times, who, indeed, flattered himself that he usually kept a step or two ahead of them: he was prophetic as well as reminiscent; had firm opinions and facile appreciations.

He and Damier spoke of Mrs. Mostyn,—Sir Henry, too, had seen her recently,—of Paris, and of her connection with it. "And by the way," said Sir Henry, "she told me that you were tremendously interested in what she told you about Madame Vicaud—Clara Chanfrey that was. Now I know a good deal about that unhappy history, and can, indeed, carry it on to a further chapter; the first did interest you?"

"Tremendously," Damier assented, feeling, with a beating heart, that daylight was about to flood his mystic temple. "Is she alive?" he added.

"That I don't know. But I saw the second chapter at close quarters. I went to Vicaud's studio one day. They had been married only a few years; she was a mere girl even then. I never saw such wretchedness."

"In what way?" Damier's heart now beat with a strange self-reproach.

"Oh—not describable. It was the evident hiding of misery that one felt most, the controlled fear in her face. She was lovelier than ever, but white, wasted, her delicate hands worn with work. The place was already poverty-stricken, but clean—grimly clean; I have no doubt she scrubbed the floor herself. Four or five artists were there—clever, well-known men, but not of the best type: the kind of men who wrote brutally realistic feuilletons for papers of the baser order, who painted pictures *pour epater le bourgeois*; grossly materialistic, cynically skeptical of all that was not so. One felt that, though utterly alien to it by taste, she could have adapted herself, in a sense, to the best bohemianism. She was broadly intelligent; she would have recognized all that was fine, vital, inspiring in it, all that it implies of antagonism to the conformist, the bourgeois attitude. But the bohemianism of her husband and his comrades could only turn her to ice. It was strange to see her fear, and yet her strength, in these surroundings. They saw it, too; her chill gentleness, her inflexible face, cowed them, made them silly rather than vicious. Only, at that time, she had not cowed her husband; at all events, he seemed to take a pleasure in showing his mastery over her, his indifference to her attitude. He was a genius, with the face of a poet and the soul of a satyr. She had charmed him by her unusualness; he had determined to have her, to snatch her, the fine, delicate creature, from another world, as it were, and to make her part of his experience of life in very much the same sense as he would have tried a new kind of sin for the sake of its novelty. Then, too, he hoped, of course, for advancement, pecuniary and social; the disappointment of that hope must have roused the fiend in him. Of course he loved her—if one can turn the word to such base uses. What man would not have loved her? He loved her as he might have loved one of his mistresses; and I remember that on that day he dared—

as perhaps he would not have dared had they been alone--to go to her before us all, fondle her cheek, and, putting his arm around her, kiss her. We all, I think, felt the ugly bravado of it, and I know that I never detested a man as I detested him at that moment. She sat motionless, expressionless. Only her eyes showed the terror of her helplessness, her despair."

"Just heavens!" Damier exclaimed, after a silence filled for him with a bewildering aching and despair. "Why did she not leave him?"

"Well," said Sir Henry, looking at the tip of his cigar, and crossing his knees for the greater comfort of impersonal reflection, "there was the child--they had a child, a girl; I never saw it; and there was her pride--she had been cast off by all her people; and there was his need of her. A few years after their marriage Vicaud took to absinthe, and drank himself half mad from time to time. Her conceptions of the duties of marriage, the sacredness of its bond, were, I am sure, very high; duty, pity, a hopeless loyalty, kept her to him, no doubt. What she went through no one, I suppose, can imagine.

"I saw her once again; I was in Paris for a few days--it must have been more than ten years after that first meeting. I met her leading her husband in an *allee* in the Bois. He was a wreck then, his talent gone, his noble face a pallid, bloated mask. He leaned on her arm, draped in his defiant black cloak. I sha'n't forget them as they walked under the October trees. She was changed, immensely changed. Her stately head was still beautiful, but with a beauty stony, frozen, as it were. There was no longer any touch of fear or softness. When she saw me she smiled with all her own gracious courtesy--but graciousness a little exaggerated; she had become, I saw, by long opposition to the life about her, almost too ineffably the lady. She had to keep, consciously, the perfume of life.

"I walked on with them, and, perhaps as a result of my evident wish to see more of her, she asked me to go back to dinner with them. I did, realizing when I got to their apartment what it must have cost her to ask me, and what the pride must be that could do it and seem indifferent in the midst of that tawdry, poverty-stricken, vicious existence. Up flights of soiled and shabby stairs, in a mean house, to a miserable room--its bareness the best thing that could be said of it--at the top of the house, overlooking a squalid quarter of Paris. There was a harp in one corner, and Madame Vicaud, in answer to my inquiry about her music, said that she gave lessons. The young daughter was at school in England, and Vicaud's old mother lived with them, a spiteful, suspicious-looking bourgeoisie with a handsome, flinty eye. Clara Vicaud gave her all the quiet deference that she would have given her had she been her equal. She had evidently forced from the old woman--forced by no effort, but by the mere compulsion of her own unflinching courtesy--a sullen respect. Her husband looked at her, spoke to her, with an odd mingling of resentment and dependence. He would say constantly, 'Que dis-tu, Claire?' But he talked, too, with the evident intention of putting her to shame before her English guest,--seeing how she bore it,--talked of gallant adventures, of the charms of various females of his acquaintance. She sat pale, mild, and cold. It was like seeing mud thrown at a statue of the Madonna.

"When she and I talked together after the supper--one could hardly call the meal a dinner--she did not make an apologetic reference to the ribaldry we had listened to. She did not refer, either, to any of the friends she no longer knew. We spoke chiefly of her daughter, and of books. The daughter was evidently the one ray of light in her existence; she told me about her progress at school, her cleverness, her beauty. And next to her daughter, reading and music had been her great resources. I was surprised at her scholarship, at her familiarity with German philosophy, English poetry, Russian fiction, French and English literary and social criticism; indeed, on the subjects of social problems, of human suffering and the various remedies, economic and ethical, suggested for it, her knowledge was far deeper than my own. But in all our talk there was not a note of the personal, the confidential, the regretful; she might have been sitting in an environment absolutely her own. I never saw her again after that evening. When I was in Paris some years later I went to the house, and heard that Monsieur Vicaud and his mother had both died there, and that Madame Vicaud, after nursing them through their last illnesses, had gone. I have often wondered what became of her."

Damier asked no further questions, and the talk drifted away from the subject of Madame Vicaud and her misfortunes. But that evening he wrote to Mrs. Mostyn, and asked her if she had not yet obtained for him some news of his lady of the photograph. The photograph had for him that night a new look; it still said, "I need you," but "I need you now. Help me." He was convinced that she lived.

Mrs. Mostyn's reply came in a day, and inclosed a letter of introduction to Madame Vicaud, Rue B----, Paris. "Sir Molyneux knew nothing of his sister's whereabouts," Mrs. Mostyn wrote, "and it was from another source that I found out that Clara still lives, and at the inclosed address. Do find her, my Don Quixote, and I must make her come and visit me."

The inclosed letter asked Madame Vicaud to recall an old friend, and to welcome Mr. Damier for her sake and his own. She had only recently had news of Madame Vicaud, and so was able, happily, to aid Mr. Damier in his great wish to make her acquaintance. She hoped, also, that she might see Madame Vicaud in England soon; would she not pay her a visit--a long one? It was a long letter, graceful, cordial, affectionate, a rope of flowers thrown to Damier for his guidance into the labyrinth.

IV



AMIER, three days afterward, stood in his sitting-room in a Paris hotel, looking with a certain astonishment at the small sheet of notepaper he held, upon which was written in a firm, flowing hand--a hand that seemed, though so gracefully, to contradict any impression of a cry for help:

DEAR MR. DAMIER: I shall be very glad to see you to-morrow afternoon at four. I well remember Mrs. Mostyn; to hear of her from a friend of hers will be a double pleasure.

Yours sincerely,
CLARA VICAUD.

It was like the evocation of a ghost to see this reality, emerged suddenly out of the dream-world where, for so long, he had thought of her, the young girl leaning on the chair-back in her flowing dress of silk. She was alive, and he was to see her that afternoon. Damier felt a chill overtake his eagerness. Was he not about to shatter a charming experience--one of the sweetest, most tender, most dearly absurd of his life? Would he not find in the real, middle-aged Clara Vicaud a hard, uninteresting woman? He had a vision of stoutly corseted robustness in jetted black cashmere; of a curve of heavy throat under the chin; of cold eyes looking with wonder, with suspicion even, upon his romantic quest. He could almost have felt it in him to draw back at the eleventh hour were he not ashamed to face in himself such cowardice. He took out the photograph and looked at it, and the eyes of Clara Chanfrey seemed to smile at him with something of tender irony. "Do not be afraid of me; I will never disappoint you," they said. After all, what could the mere passage of years mean to such a face as that? What could the bitter experiences of a sorrowful life hold in them to tarnish ever the spirit that looked from it? The reluctance was only superficial, a ripple of reaction upon the deep tide of his impulse.

At four that afternoon he drove to a long, narrow street near the Boulevard St. Germain--a street of large, bleak houses showing a sort of dismantled stateliness. At one of the largest, stateliest, bleakest of these the fiacre stopped, and Damier, after asking the way of a grimly respectable concierge with a small knitted shawl of black wool folded tightly about her shoulders, mounted a wide, uncarpeted stone staircase to the highest floor, feeling, as he stood outside the door, that, despite the long ascent, the thick beating of his heart was due more to emotional than to physical causes.

He rang, and as he stood waiting he heard suddenly within a woman's voice singing. The voice was beautiful, and the song was Schumann's "Im wunderschönen Monat Mai." Its pathos, its simplicity, its tenderness, mingled with Damier's almost tremulous mood, and pierced his very soul. It was like an awakening in Paradise; there was the remembered sadness of a long, long past; the strange, melancholy rapture of something dawning, something unknown and wonderful. Could any music more fitly usher in the coming meeting?

A middle-aged servant came to the door, conventual in the demure quiet of her dress and demeanor, and ushered Damier into a bare and spacious room where the light from scantily curtained windows shone broadly across the polished floor. A woman rose and came forward from the piano. Damier's first impression, after the breathless moment in which he saw that it was not *she*, was one of dazzling beauty.

"I am Mademoiselle Vicaud--Claire Vicaud," this young woman said, "and you are Mr. Damier. My mother is expecting you; she will be here directly."

Perhaps he felt, as she smiled gravely upon him, it was the power in her face, rather than its beauty, that had dazzled him. Already he discovered something almost repellent in its enchantment. Her eyes were dark, with a still, an impenetrable darkness; a small mole emphasized the scarlet curve of her upper lip; the lines of cheek and brow were wonderfully beautiful. It was, indefinably, in the soft spreading of the nostrils, in the deeply sunk corners of the mouth, that one felt a plebeian touch. There was nothing, however, of this quality in the carriage of her head, with its heavy tiara of dark-red hair; nor in the dignity and grace of her figure; and nothing in her, except some vague suggestion in this grace and dignity, reminded him of the photograph; and he was at once deeply glad of this, glad that Mademoiselle Vicaud resembled her father--he felt sure she did--and not her mother.

She seated herself, indicating to him a chair near her, and observed him with the same grave smile, and in an unembarrassed silence, while he spoke of his pleasure at being in Paris, at finding them there. Damier himself was not unembarrassed; found it difficult to talk trivialities to this Hebe while thrilling with expectation; and Mademoiselle Vicaud, unable otherwise to interpret it, may well have seen in her own radiant apparition the cause of his slight disturbance.

"But you are not old," she said to him.

"Did you expect that?" he inquired.

"Then you are not a friend of Mamma's--a friend of her youth, I mean? I don't think that she was quite sure who you were."

"It is only through an old friend of hers that--I hope to become another," Damier finished, smiling.

"Well, *pour commencer*, you may be our young friend--we have time, you and I, before we need think of being old ones. I get tired of old things, myself."

"Even of old friends?" Damier asked, amused at her air of placid familiarity.

"Ah, that depends."

He observed that Mademoiselle Vicaud, though speaking English with fluent ease, had in her voice and manner some most un-English qualities. Her voice was soft, deep, and a little guttural. She had a way, he noticed later on, of saying "Ah" when one talked to her, a placid little ejaculation that was curiously characteristic and curiously foreign.

But at the moment further observations were arrested. The door opened, and rising, as a swift footfall entered the room, Damier found himself face to face with his lady of the photograph.

He blushed. His emotion showed itself very evidently on his handsome, sensitive face, so evidently that the strangeness of the meeting made itself felt as a palpable atmosphere, and made conventional greetings an effort and something of an absurdity. Madame Vicaud, however, dared the absurdity, and so successfully that the formal sweetness of her smile, the vague geniality of her voice, as she said right things to him, seemed effortless. Damier, through all the tumult of his hurrying impressions, comparisons, wonders, yet found time to feel that she was a woman who could make many efforts and seem to make none. Her manner slid past the stress of the moment; her wonder, if she felt any, was not visible. All that she showed to her sudden visitor, introducing himself through a past that must have been long dead to her, was the smile, the geniality, vague and formal, of the woman of the world.

By contrast to this atmosphere of rule and reticence, the few words he had exchanged with the daughter seemed suddenly intimate--seemed to make a bond where the mother's made a barrier. But above all barriers, all reticences, was the one fact--the wonderful fact--that she was she, changed so much, yet so much the same that the change was only a deepening, a subtilizing of her charm.

"Yes, I remember Mrs. Mostyn so well," said Madame Vicaud, "and it is many years ago now. She must be old. Does she look old? Is she well? Will she come to Paris one day, do you think? Ah, as for my going to England to see her, that is a great temptation, a sufficient one were the possibility only as great. My daughter has been much in England; she really, now, knows it better than I do."

Mademoiselle Vicaud did not meet her mother's glance as it rested upon her; her eyes were fixed, with their dark placidity, upon Damier, as she sat sidewise in her chair, her hands--they were large, white, beautifully formed--loosely interlaced on the chair-back.

"Yes; I know England well," she said--"educational England. I went to school there. I associate England with all that is formative and improving; I have been run through the mold so many times."

"Run through?" Damier asked, smiling. "Have you never taken the form, then?" He was not interested in Mademoiselle Vicaud, although he felt intimate with her; but her mother's glance brought her between them, placed her there; one was forced to look at her and to talk to her.

"Do you think I have?" Mademoiselle Vicaud asked, with her smile, that was not gay, a slumberous, indulgent smile. "I hope not," she added, "physically, at least. I don't like your English outline, as far as that is concerned." Damier could but observe that hers was not English. She was supple, curved--slender, yet robust; one saw her soft breathing; her waist bent with a lovely flexibility. But the contemplation of these facts, to which she seemed, with the indifference of perfect assurance, to draw his attention, emphasized that sense of intimacy in a way that rather irritated him; Mademoiselle Vicaud, her outline and her exquisite gowning of it, slightly jarred upon him. He hardly knew how to word his appreciation of her difference, and after saying that he was glad she had escaped the more unbecoming influences of his country, added: "I hope that there were some things you cared to adopt."

"They adopted me. I was quite passive, quite fluid," said Mademoiselle Vicaud.

Her mother, while they interchanged these slight pleasantries, continued to look at her daughter.

"You rather exaggerate, do you not, Claire, the coercive nature of your English experience?" she said. "It was not all school; there was play, too."

"Play like the kindergarten kind, with a meaning in it. My mother has always been anxious for me to take the right impressions," said Mademoiselle Vicaud, her eyes still on Damier; "she has always chosen them for me."

There was a momentary silence after this--a silence that might, Damier fancied, have held something of irritation for the mother, though none showed itself in the calm intelligence of her glance as it rested on her daughter.

Looking from her before the pause could become significant of anything like argument or antagonism, she asked Damier for how long he expected to remain in Paris, and the talk floated easily into cheerful and familiar channels--concerts, the play, books, and pictures.

She was so much more like the photograph than he had expected, and yet so different! The figure was the same, almost girlish, more girlish, really, than Mademoiselle Claire's, though the fall in the line of her shoulders, the erect poise with which she sat, recalled a girlishness of another epoch, another tradition.

There was that in the folds of her long silk skirt,—a worn, shining silk, yet in its antiquity replete with elegance,—in the position of her narrow foot pointing from beneath its folds, in the way she lightly folded her arms while she talked to him, that suggested deportment, a manner trained, and as much a part of her as putting on her shoes was. She was very mannered and very unaffected; the manner was like the graceful garment of her perfect ease and naturalness—their protection, perhaps, and their ornament. As for her face, Damier, looking at it while they talked, felt its enchantment growing on him, like the gradual tuning of exquisite instruments preparing him for perfect music. Still, the face of the photograph, so unchanged that it was startling to feel how much older it was. The abundant hair was dressed in the same fashion, but its black was now of an odd grayness that made one just aware that it was no longer black. The heart-shaped oval was emphasized; the cheeks were thin, the chin sharply delicate, the lips compressed when she did not smile—but she frequently smiled—into a line of endurance, of a patience almost bitter. There were tones of pale mauve in the faint roses of her lips and cheeks, but Damier felt that this charming tint must always have been theirs—went with the snow and ebony of her type. Although her face was little lined,—emotion with her had been repressed, not demonstrated,—it had a look more aging than lines—a look of bleakness, of a cold impassivity. The texture of her skin was like a white rose-petal just fading. And in this faded whiteness her dark eyes gazed, more stern, more tragic than in youth. There was in them, and in the straight line of her black brows above them, a somberness and almost a menace. Damier wondered over the strange contrast to her frequent smile. He saw that where Mademoiselle Vicaud was still and grave her mother was light and gay, but the gaiety and lightness—he traced the impression further—were part of the manner, the protecting, ornamental manner; were something that had once been real, and were now put on, like her shoes, again. The daughter showed herself, or seemed to show herself, imperturbably: the mother was hidden, masked; her eyes, with their contrasting smile, made him think of Tragedy glancing among garlands of roses.

Before he went, that day, Damier told Madame Vicaud that his stay in Paris was to be indefinite; had even let her see, if she wished to, that she counted among his reasons for staying. He was sure that he was to go far, but he knew that he must go with discretion. One thing discretion evidently required of him—to include Mademoiselle Claire with her mother; her mother constantly included her. It was necessary to invite them both to drive in the Bois next day. It was then that he learned that Madame Vicaud and her daughter both gave lessons, mademoiselle in singing,—she had studied with the best masters,—madame in the harp and piano. Damier cast a glance upon the harp; the same, no doubt. Hours of engagements had to be consulted. They could both, however, be free next day at four.

V

DAMIER was able, while waiting for them in the salon on the following day, to see more clearly Madame Vicaud's environment, now that it was empty of her. It was one of work, poverty, and refinement. Books lined one side of the walls; the furniture was of the scantiest, simplest description; a row of old prints—after Sir Joshua and Gainsborough, some of them very good—were hung straightly above the simple writing-table; on this table stood a small pot of pink flowers, and on a large table near the center of the room were books, reviews, and a work-box; the harp and the grand piano dominated the room. The high windows did not overlook the street, but the branches, flecked still with gold and russet autumn leaves, of an old garden. Turning from this outlook, Damier found his attention fixed by a large photograph that occupied a prominent place in a black frame upon a sedate cabinet near the window. It was the photograph of a man—of Monsieur Vicaud, Damier knew at once. He gazed long at the face, still young, yet showing already touches of decay and degradation in the poetry and beauty of its youth. Without these touches—of presage more than actuality—it might have been the face of a Paolo, with tossed-back hair and superb, unfettered throat. Monsieur Vicaud had evidently been one of the few men whom a Byronic disarray becomes. Damier saw in the face the enchantment that had deluded Clara Chanfrey, and hints of the horror that had wrecked all enchantment. The longer one looked at the ardent, dreamy eyes, the perfect lips,—helpless, as it were, before one, and unable in charm of change to divert one's attention from their essential meaning,—the more one felt cruel selfishness, hard indifference, and lurking evil. Instinctively he turned and walked away from Monsieur Vicaud as he heard footsteps outside.

When the mother and daughter came in together, he could infer, even more clearly than from the bareness of the salon, from Madame Vicaud's shabby furs and unfashionable wrap, that life, to be kept up at all with niceness and finish, must be something of a struggle for them; yet, with her small black bonnet, which she was tying with black gauze ribbons beneath her chin, her neat gloves, the poise of her shoulders, and her swift, light step, she was still unmistakably *une elegante*. It was natural, he supposed,—though feeling some resentment at such naturalness,—that the struggle should be the mother's mainly; the law of maternal self-sacrifice perhaps demanded it. Claire was charmingly dressed, simply, and with a Parisienne's unerring sense of harmony and fitness. She was neither shabby nor unfashionable; the fashion, too, expressed her, not itself.

After all, she still, though she was no longer *une toute jeune fille*,—she must be twenty-seven,—had her life before her, and her achievement of pretty clothes could hardly be imputed as blame to her.

The early November afternoon in the Bois was misty, with sunlight in the mist; the air was mild. Madame Vicaud's dark eyes looked down the long vistas, seeing, perhaps, other figures in them, other pictures. Damier and Mademoiselle Vicaud talked of Italy. She had never been there, but she questioned him about Florence and Rome, and Madame Vicaud asked him if he had heard much of the old church music; and the music had been his greatest enjoyment. Madame Vicaud was fond of Palestrina, she said; but she said little of the fondness, and only listened with a half-detached, half-assenting smile while Claire and the young man went on from Gluck to Wagner. Mademoiselle Vicaud was full of admiration--though her admirations were always unemphatic--for the latter; but Madame Vicaud, though retaining, evidently, no lurking survivals of taste for the operatic music of her youth, would own only to a tempered liking for the great opera-master. She mused lightly over Damier's demand for her preferences, and inclined to think that opera never meant much to her; it was a form of art that offended her taste almost inevitably; its appeal to the eye could so rarely justify itself, and the music, of course, was restricted by its being pinned down to definite descriptive themes.

Claire hummed out, in a melancholy, emotional contralto, a phrase from "Tristan." "I can't sing him--none of our French throats can; but he fills me, sweeps me up; that is all I ask of music. Mamma likes music to lift her; I like it to carry me away." Among the deep, almost purple reds of her hair, the tawny luster of her coiling furs, her cheeks, in the keen, fresh air, glowed dimly. "No, I could not sing Wagner," she sighed; "but I could sing. I am an *artiste manquee*; the one, perhaps, for being my father's daughter, the other for being my mother's. She would rather have me teach--try to force a little of my own energy and feeling into dough-like souls--than have me sing in public." Mademoiselle Vicaud's smile had no rancor as she made these statements, and her mother's distant gaze showed no change, nor did she speak.

"It is a hard and a rather tawdry life, that of an opera-singer," said Damier; "and, I fancy, almost an impossible one in Paris."

"Ah, but I am tawdry," Claire observed. If antagonism there had ever been on this subject, it had evidently long since left behind it the stage of discussion. Claire made no appeal or protest--merely stated facts.

"You see," she went on, very much as if she and Damier were alone together, "if it were not for that artist nature, Mamma would not, perhaps, mind so much. It is because I am not--what shall we call it?--respectable? *hein?*--well, that will serve--that she dreads such tests for me."

Damier now saw that, though Madame Vicaud's silence kept all its calm, she very slightly flushed. He felt in her a something, proud and shrinking, that steeled itself to hear the jarring note of her daughter's jest; and was it a jest? Again the contrast in the two faces struck him, this time with something of fundamental alienation in the contrast. It occupied his mind after Madame Vicaud, very unemphatically, not at all as if she felt that it needed turning, took the lead of the conversation, and while Claire, leaning back in her corner, listened with, when she was particularly addressed, her indolent "Ah!" It was, indeed, like going from one world to another to look from her mother's face to hers. Already he felt for her a mingling of irritation and pity that was to grow as he knew her better.

How strangely she was tainted with something really almost *canaille*; the soft depth of her voice reeked with it. And how strangely blind must the affection of the mother be that could bridge the chasm that separated her from her daughter, unconscious--her evident devotion to her proved that--of its very existence.

VI



ADAME and Mademoiselle Vicaud were at home on Tuesdays, and Damier felt that he would always receive a courteously cordial welcome on these formal occasions; but he felt, too, for some weeks, that the courtesy, the pleasant graciousness of his reception, did not grow in warmth. He was accepted, but no more. Madame Vicaud treated him as she might have treated him had he been but one habitue of a crowded salon. Her salon was anything but crowded; he soon had numbered its habitues. There was a monotony about these Tuesday reunions; they were rather thin and colorless; thin only in quantity, not in quality, for that was excellent--reminded him of Madame Vicaud's black silk dresses with their white lawn cuffs and collars, a quality worn but irreproachable. Damier came to find a flavor; an unusualness, in the cool cheerfulness of the Tuesday teas.

The salon in the Rue B---- on these occasions had some vases of flowers, and the tea, brought in by the monastic Angelique, boasted bread and butter and *madeleines* as well as the daily *petits beurrés* that Damier had been offered on a more informal visit.

To the teas came old Madame Depressier, who was of an impoverished Huguenot family, and who spent her time in works of charity, a serene woman with a large white face--a woman, Damier found on talking to her, of character and learning. She and Madame Vicaud talked of books, lectures, and poor people, and smiled much together. Madame Crecy came also, dignified, middle-aged, interested in *le mouvement feministe*, a writer of essays, dark, decisive, a charm in her bright ugliness. There was a dim, devout, and gentle old Comtesse de Comprailles. She had known Madame Vicaud for years, from before her marriage, and her piety had lifted her above the realization of the secular troubles of her friend,

and had, indeed, kept their relation a softly superficial one. With the comtesse came sometimes a tall, thin priest, her cousin, also dim, devout, and gentle in these social relations with heretics.

There was a young Polish art-student, a girl with a thin, ardent face, and an attire manlike from its deficiency of adornment rather than from any pose. She wore very short cloth skirts,--shortened by several years of wear and mending, our acutely sympathetic young man guessed,--a knotted handkerchief around her throat, and a soft felt hat. To this young woman, who, Damier heard, had great talent and was miserably poor, Madame Vicaud showed a peculiar tenderness. Sophie Labrinska had a look at once weary and keen. She seldom spoke, but her face lighted up with a smile for her hostess, and on Tuesdays she always played to them--and played with an ungirl-like mastery and beauty of interpretation--a ballade, nocturne, or mazurka of Chopin.

Lady Vibert and her daughter came too. They lived in a tiny flat near the Bois, finding poverty in Paris more genial and resourceful than in England. Miss Vibert, a fresh-colored young woman with prominent teeth, studied art also, and for years had gone daily to a studio from which, each week, she brought back to the tiny flat a life-size torso, very neatly painted. She and her mother were cheerful, eager people, taking their Paris, their *abonnement* at the Theatre Francais,--a rite they religiously fulfilled,--their bi-weekly lecture at the Ecole de France, with a pleasant seriousness. Madame Vicaud lifted her eyebrows and smiled a little, though very kindly, over Miss Vibert's artistic progress; but she was fond of her.

As for Claire, she showed little fondness, with one exception, for any of her mother's guests. Miss Vibert talked to her in clear, high tones, but Claire spoke little to her, and only answered with her most slumberous smiles. For Sophie she had neither smiles nor words. She ignored her--but not with an effect of intentional ignoring; it was merely that the little Polish girl made no advances, and unless she were advanced to, Claire, in her mother's salon, maintained an air of indolent detachment--except for one member of it, the only one who could be said to recall, definitely, what there was of bohemia in Madame Vicaud's past. Monsieur Claude Daunay did no more than recall it, for his bohemianism was of a most tempered quality, consisting in a kindly indifference to smallnesses, a half-humorous choice of the unconventional rather than an ignorant imprisonment in it. He was a man of about fifty, and his massive gray head, Jovian hair and beard, his kindly, wearied eyes and stooping yet stalwart figure, made him a distinguished apparition at Madame Vicaud's teas. She placed him, sketched him for Damier in a few words, the most open that her reserve had yet allowed her, and it was then only after a good many Tuesdays: "He knew my husband, and was very kind to him, and to me, when we were in need of kindness. He has no genius,--he, too, is a painter, you know,--but a vast appreciation, and a vast generosity in the expression of it, and much distinction of mind and talent."

Monsieur Daunay was married, but his marriage was an unfortunate one. Madame Daunay had been the reverse of a model wife; she lived, an invalid, a life of retirement in the country, and was supposed to make much bitterness in the existence of her husband, who had his home with a *vieille fille* cousin in Paris. Damier liked the scholarly artist, his mild smile and air of weary unexpectancy.

It was with Monsieur Daunay that Claire was her most vivid self, with him and with their new "young" friend--though, when Monsieur Daunay was present, Damier's relegation to the background bespoke an excellent loyalty to older ties. There was something very nearly filial in her graceful and affectionate solicitude for Monsieur Daunay. She would sweep, in trailing gowns, always a little over-perfumed,--it was the point where her taste seemed to fail her,--and always late, into the salon, and, if Monsieur Daunay were there, go at once to him after a formal acknowledgment of the other presences in the room. She did not talk much with him,--she talked more to Damier,--but while he talked to her she smiled at him, an encouraging, responsive smile.

Monsieur Daunay spoke to Damier of Madame Vicaud as *une ame exquisite*, and of Claire as *une charmante enfant*, a term emphasizing his almost paternal attitude, an emphasis made more noticeable by his more formal relations with the mother. Damier saw that he was very fond of Claire, but that between him and Madame Vicaud there were no bonds closer than a courteous understanding and regard. On Tuesday, after tea and talk, music would be brought out, candles lighted at the piano, Claire would sing while Monsieur Daunay accompanied her on the piano or her mother on the harp, Sophie would play her Polish music, and Monsieur Daunay and Madame Vicaud give a solo each or a duet. There was not a trace of the amateur in these performances; the pleasure was great, and, for Damier, the charm too deep for analysis, in this listening with her, or to her, in the quiet room, among these quiet, subdued, rather sad people.

He was still, in a sense, outside the barrier, but they all were, he fancied, in the sense he meant. These Tuesdays were the nearest, really, that any of them ever came to her. Yet they were more definitely accepted as friends: he was still the onlooker.

It was only humorously that he resented his slow advance to a more individual standing. He could hardly himself measure it; and yet he felt that he was being observed, weighed, thought over, and, almost imperceptibly, that her smile for him gained in meaning.



T was through a book they spoke of, a book which he said he would bring to her, that they came at last and, for the first time really, alone together. He found her in the firelit room; her last pupil had gone, and she was sitting before her harp, her hands in her lap, her eyes looking vaguely in front of her. There had been a fall of snow, and the chill February afternoon outside was desolate in its white and gray and black. Within there was the serenity, the flicker of firelight, Madame Vicaud, and her silent harp.

She turned her head with her smile of welcome, and, as he drew a chair near hers, lightly touched a harp-string. The throb of the vibrant note echoed in the young man's heart. For the first time, after a winter of patient waiting, he was alone with his mystery, alone with the woman he adored; for that he adored this cold, sweet, faded woman, with her fragrant life blossoming on its black background, was as much a fact of his existence as that he had seen her photograph on that distant sunny day.

"My work is over," she said. "I am feeling indolent. Ah, you have brought the book; thank you. Will you read it now to me--a little?" She leaned back, smiling still; her eyes, he felt, studying him more openly, yet more kindly, than ever before. "Will you ring for the candles then, or would you rather sit on for a little while in this blindman's holiday?"

"I would rather sit on, and have you play to me, if you are not too tired."

"I am tired of teaching--of listening, not of playing." She at once adjusted her foot, stretched her arms, bending to the instrument, and played an old and plaintive melody.

"Exquisite," said Damier, when it ended. "It is so staid in form, yet so melancholy in feeling."

"Yes; like the melancholy of a sad heart, whispering its sorrow to itself under the lace and brocade of a long-dead epoch." She went on to a joyous little pastoral, and said, smiling at him, that that was like a bank of primroses; and, after the next, "And that all innocent solemnity and sweetness, like a nun's prayer." And when she had finished they sat in silence for some time.

"Have you always played?" he asked her at last, seeing her suddenly as a young girl in a white dress, with a green ribbon around her waist, an emerald locket at her throat, sitting at her harp.

"Always; I learned when I was a child." The unspoken sadness of the past seemed to steal about them; he seemed to hear the "sad heart whispering to itself" as they sat there in the firelight.

"I have often thought," Madame Vicaud said, turning suddenly toward him and smiling with a touch of constraint, "that it was very nice of you to seek us out like this. I have often wanted to speak to you about it. For it was you rather than Mrs. Mostyn who sought, was it not? What made you think of it?" she asked, her smile growing in sweetness as his eyes dwelt on hers.

"It was a very romantic reason," Damier said; "or, no, I won't belittle my reason by that trivial term; it was a very serious reason, rather, a very real one. I saw your photograph in an album belonging to Mrs. Mostyn, and then I wanted to see you."

She looked at him in silence.

"How very strange!" she presently said. "Wanted enough for that?"

"To seek you? Quite enough; more." He smiled. "Yes, it was strange--is strange. I did not know whether you were alive or dead, nor did Mrs. Mostyn."

"And you set out in quest of me?"

"Yes, after a time. At first Mrs. Mostyn could hear nothing of you. I met another old acquaintance of yours--Sir Henry Quarle. He talked to me about you, too, and immediately afterward I got your address from Mrs. Mostyn and her letter to you. Then I set out at once."

Madame Vicaud looked at him with a grave, speculating look for some silent moments, before saying, turning her eyes away and once more showing constraint in her voice:

"You heard that I had been unfortunate--unhappy? You were sorry for that?"

"Yes; but had you been very fortunate, very happy, I should still have looked for you."

"But why? Did you like my face so much?"

"So much. I felt that I should have known you long ago, and that, having missed you for so long through the stupid accident of the years, I must know you always in the future. I should have felt it had you been dead." His charming eyes dwelling on her with a perfect candor and simplicity, for it was easy at last to speak these familiar thoughts to her, he added: "I needed you; I had always needed you. And so, it seemed to me, you needed me; your eyes in the photograph called to me."

At this she looked swiftly at him with an astonishment that slowly softened to a smile. "You are a strange, a good friend," she said.

"You accept me as such?"

"Ah, yes," she replied, "I accept you as such--gratefully. I don't call you. Those days are over."

She rose, pushing the harp aside, and walked slowly down the room, pausing at the window and looking out. He

divined that she was much touched, even that there were tears in her eyes. He feared to show her the depths of his feeling for her, his longing to enter her life, help her, if it might be, in it; but, rising too, he said in a slightly trembling voice: "You don't need my friendship, but I need yours. Let that be my claim."

"Your claim to what?" she asked, her face still turned from him.

"To the hope that I may grow into your confidence--the hope that you will lean on me, trust me completely, and that, with time, I may, perhaps, mean something to you of what you mean to me."

Her face now, as she looked at him, showed a curious, a vivid look of wonder, humor, tenderness, and sadness.

"What am I, that I should mean so much to you? You don't know me."

"Is that your kind way of intimating that I can mean nothing to you--that you don't know me?" he smiled.

"Ah, don't think that I am so hard and stupid!" she said quickly. "Don't think that I am fencing with you, trying to ward off a friendship I can't appreciate. Don't think that I have no need of a friend. I have; I have--only I had forgotten to feel it. I do not say that I have no friends; you know that I have, and good ones--only you do not wish to rank with them. Isn't it so?" She smiled swiftly, from her gravity, at him. "There is good Madame Depressier, and the comtesse, and little Sophie,--who needs me, poor child, in her struggle and loneliness,--and the others, true and good all; but none near. You would be near,--would you not?--and have me share pain with you--lean on you, you say." His fine young face, stern with eagerness, followed her words in silent assent. "But it would be difficult for me to have such a friend. I have never had such a friend. It is difficult, painful to me to show myself, be myself. I am a hard, I fear a spoiled, stunted nature. You heard--of course you must have heard; it is the one thing that anybody must hear who hears at all of me--that my marriage was very unhappy. It warped me; it froze me. There was no one to help me when I needed help, or to hear me, even had I not been too proud to call, and I lost the power of appeal or self-expression. If I had been gentler, less bitter in my despair, less rebellious, I might have kept more in touch with life, been more natural, more responsive. As it is, I can still feel--deeply, deeply; but it is hard for me to respond. I am old enough to be your mother. No? Well, almost." She smiled slightly at his exactitude. "I am very different from the girl in the photograph whose eyes called to you--prophetic eyes they must have been! You must not expect fine things of me; you must not idealize me." She put her hand gently, maternally on his shoulder. "Never idealize me. That is a dangerous--a terrible thing to do."

"Can you look at me," he asked, putting his hand on hers--"can you look at me and think that I could idealize you?--see you as anything else than you are? Don't you feel that, indeed, I can see you much more clearly than you see yourself--the girl in the photograph, and the woman old enough, almost old enough, to be my mother? You are shut into your present. I see you in it--and in all your past."

She stood looking gravely into his eyes as he looked into hers. In hers there was--not seen by him and hardly felt by herself--a swiftly passing, an immense regret, an immense sadness. It was like the sweeping shadow of a flying wing, and left only the limpidity of sweetest, most candid acquiescence. In his eyes, too, there was regret--passionate regret; and he felt it, and felt that she could not understand or read it, nor the vague, strong hope that so strangely informed it.

"So I have a friend, a new yet an old friend," said Madame Vicaud. "You perplex me, but I believe in all you say. You give me great happiness."

He lifted the hand under his and bent his lips to it. She looked down at his bowed head with a smile that was a benediction.

On that first day of their friendship, as they sat together, she again before her harp, it was, oddly, he who leaned and confided. Almost boyishly, under her comprehending eyes, he unfolded for her his life, its deepest efforts and its deepest disappointments. Madame Vicaud, while he talked and she questioned, drew her fingers softly, from time to time, across her harp-strings. He never forgot the hour, nor the sense of communion that the silvery ripple of the harp-strings made paradisiacal.

"And will you not marry? Have you not thought of marrying?" she asked.

He considered her with what he knew to be a whimsical smile at her unconsciousness.

"I have been too great a coward ever to get further than thinking of it. My love-affairs have rarely passed the speculative stage. My ideals of marriage are of a most exacting nature."

"Ah, that is well," she said. "Never lower them to fit some reality that, for the moment, appeals. I hope," she added, "that you will some day find the woman who realizes them."

No, the silly accident of the years too much blinded her, Damier felt, for her to see, yet, that she was the woman. He himself was too much dazzled to see beyond the fact itself. Any question of love or marriage seemed irrelevant, did not enter at all into this wonderful and happy place where her harp rippled, her eyes smiled, where she understood that he had found her.

VIII



FTER this there was no more the feeling of a barrier. It was gone; and with perfect graciousness and trust she admitted him to the personal standing and nearness he had asked for. She was all confidence now, although she made no confidences. He felt that her trust in him hid nothing from him, and yet that her pride made her past sorrows so poignantly intimate that they must be understood between her friend and herself, not spoken of.

The nearer intimacy with the mother did not bring Damier into nearer intimacy with the daughter, for the simple reason that he was already so intimate. From the first Damier had felt that he understood Claire Vicaud. He could not yet clearly define what he understood, but she could have no revelations for him. Her father explained her, and her mother reclaimed her. That was her history, and he imagined that neither she nor her mother was aware of the history, but the mother less than she. Indeed, he fancied, at times, that he saw her far more clearly than did the mother--hoping that the mother had not his direct vision.

He was rather fond of Claire, with a fondness tolerant, humorous, and pitying. What he saw in her were thwarted energies, well thwarted, yet pathetic in their enforced composure; he saw voiceless rebellion, and the dumb discomfort of a creature reared in an environment not its own. This simile might have cast a reproach upon the mother had it conjured up the vision of an unkindly caged pantheress; but the simile so seen was too poetical for Claire. It was not the wild, fine, free thing of nature that circumstance had caged, but the product of over-civilized senses--senses only, and corrupt senses. There was the point that made her piteous and repellent.

Claire's claim on life was not a high one. Hers was not even an esthetic fastidiousness of sense nor a romantic coloring of emotion; there was nothing delicate or warm or eager about her. Her wishes were not yearnings; they were steadfast inclinations toward all the evident, the palpable, perhaps the baser pleasures of life, pleasures that would most certainly have been hers had not fate--in the shape of a mother to whom these pleasures were non-existent rather than despicable--lifted her above the possible grasp at them: jewels, clothes, magnificent establishments, riotous living. She was cold, but she would welcome passively the warmth of admiration about her. She had not her father's genius to transmute the tawdry cravings of her inheritance from him. She had his quick, clear intelligence, and it seemed only to make harder, more decisive, her centering in self.

Damier could see her as the painted prima donna (never as the sincere and serious artist), bowing her languorous triumph before the curtain; could see her laughing in ugly mirth at Gallic jests among a crowd of clever *rapins*; could horribly image her--most horribly when one remembered who was her mother--rolling in a lightly swung carriage down the Avenue des Acacias, a modern Cleopatra in her barge, alluring in indifference under her parasol, and dressed with the consummate and conscious art that does not flower in the sound soil of respectability. These were, indeed, horrid thoughts, and as absurd as horrid when the mother stood beside them. Even to think them seemed to put a dagger into a heart already many times stabbed. Yet separate mother and daughter--it was ominously easy so to separate them--and nothing in Claire reproached and contradicted such images. Inevitably they arose, and, as inevitably, the companion picture of the mother, like a transfixed Mater Dolorosa.

To the mother he felt that in giving interest and attention to Claire he rendered a service more grateful to her than any homage. He proposed that he should take Claire for walks sometimes, and he felt something of the staidness of the girl's upbringing in Madame Vicaud's acquiescence, in its implied trust--a trust that waived a custom in his favor. It expressed the mother's attitude against all that was lax or undignified in life. Claire could go with him, their friend, but, Claire told him with a light laugh, she seldom went out alone. "Only sometimes with Monsieur Daunay--but he is like a father, almost; and to the dressmaker's; and almost always Mamma is with me--we are such companions, you know." Damier could not quite determine as to possible irony in her placid tones. He looked upon these walks with Claire--they would cross the Seine, looking up at Carpeaux's jocund group on the Pavillon de Flore, and pace sedately in the Tuileries Gardens or up the Champs-Elysees--as expressions of his identification of himself with Madame Vicaud's interests, for he always felt that it pleased her that he should ask Claire to go; yet, after each one of them, he could not defend himself from the strange sensation that he had been in an atmosphere disloyal to his friend. The atmosphere was so different, yet so subtly different, when Claire was alone with him, or with him and her mother. So subtle was the difference that any remonstrance on his part might constitute a stupid rebuff to her unconsciousness; yet so different were her tones, her look, her laugh, so different the quality of her frankness, its *gaillardise*, as it were, and its familiarity, almost insolent in its assurance--so different were all these that he could hardly believe her unconscious of the change. He did understand her; that was the trouble: for she acted as if he did, and as if all pretenses were unnecessary between them, and free breathing a relief to both after a burdensome atmosphere. Damier, while they walked, showed a grave kindness, listened to her, assented or dissented with a careful accuracy that amused himself. He was not quite sure why, with Claire, he seldom felt it safe to be flexible or flippant; some dim instinct of self-protection before this embryotic soul and quick intelligence made him guard himself against all misinterpretations, made him scrupulous in defining the differences between them. Claire referred little to her mother, and then, at least in the beginnings of their intercourse, in the tones of commonplace respect, with something of the effect, he more and more

realized, of shuffling aside an excellence that they both took for granted but hardly cared to linger over--she certainly did not, though he might have odd, pretty tastes for the past and done with.

What to him was poetry--for, to a certain extent, she seemed to appreciate his attitude toward her mother--was to her the mere furniture of life. Damier resented, but for some time was helpless; she gave him no occasion for declaration or defense. Once or twice, when, *a propos de bottes*, as far as actual comment was required, he seriously spoke of his deep admiration for her mother, Claire listened with a *cela-va-sans-dire* expression vastly baffling. Only by degrees, and only after some definite sharpnesses on his side, did she seem to realize that, in including him in her own casual attitude toward her mother, she not only misinterpreted but irritated and antagonized him. After that realization she never so offended again. Indeed, with an air of honoring his fantastic sensitiveness, yet with gravity, as if to show him that she, too, could appreciate moral charm, the pathos of defeat and finality, she often alluded to her mother's fine and gracious qualities; but, in spite of this concession, Damier was still aware of the indefinable difference that made the atmosphere seem disloyal.

She said one day: "You have really decided to live in Paris--for ever and ever--*hein*? Is it we you are studying? Do you find us interesting?"

"Véry," replied Damier.

"But the world is full of so many more interesting people," said Claire, "than two ladies, one almost old and one rapidly leaving her youth behind her, who live the narrowest of lives and give lessons to make butter for their bread."

"I have not met many more interesting."

"Then it is--to study us?" Her sleepy smile was upon him.

Damier had certainly no intention of confiding in Claire the reasons for his stay in Paris, feeling suddenly, indeed, that the young woman herself formed a rather serious problem in all practical considerations of these reasons; yet the attitude implied in her question demanded a negative. "No, it isn't because I am studying you; it is because I am fond of you," he said, bringing out the words with a touch of awkwardness, feeling their simplicity to be almost crude.

Claire was reflectively silent for some moments, observing his face, he knew, though he was not looking at her.

"*Vous etes un original*," she said at last, with quite the manner of her race when abandoning, as impenetrable to rational probes, some specimen of British eccentricity.

On another day a little incident occurred, slight, yet destined to impress Damier with a deeper sense of Claire's unsoundness. They were walking down the Champs-Elysees, in the windy brightness of a March afternoon, when, in the distance, near the Rond Point, they discerned the easily recognizable figure of Monsieur Daunay. Claire, as this old friend appeared upon the field of vision, put her hand in Damier's arm and, drawing him toward one of the smaller streets that slope down to the spacious avenue, said, smiling unemphatically: "Don't let us meet him."

"Why not?" Damier inquired, surprised, and conscious in his surprise of a quick hostility to Claire and to her smiling look of dexterous evasion.

"He hasn't seen us--come," she insisted, though the insistence was still veiled in humor.

"Why should he not see us? I shall be glad to see him."

Her eyes measured Monsieur Daunay's distance before she said, with something of impatience at his slowness of comprehension: "He will be shocked--think it improper--our walking out alone like this." Damier stared at her, stolidly resistant to the soft pull of her hand.

"Improper? Your mother consenting--you an Englishwoman, I an Englishman?"

"He is a Frenchman, and I am half French; you seem to forget that, both you and Mamma, at times." If she was irritated with him she successfully controlled her irritation, and Monsieur Daunay was so near that flight before his misinterpretation was impossible. She evidently resigned herself to the situation of Damier's making--let him feel, with a shrug of her shoulders, that it was of his making indeed, but, by a half-indifferent, half-ironic smile, that he was forgiven; he must be strong enough for both of them, the smile said.

Monsieur Daunay approached, doffing his hat, and Damier at once perceived that there was certainly in his eye a cogitation very courteous, but altogether out of keeping, he thought, with the importance of its cause. He himself felt absent-minded, his thoughts engaged more with the analysis of the new and disagreeable sensation Claire had given him than with the sensations she might have given Monsieur Daunay. He replied somewhat vaguely to Monsieur Daunay's salutations, and, not so vaguely, heard Claire saying, "Mamma has sent us out for a walk."

"Fine weather for walking," Monsieur Daunay replied, looking away from the young woman up at the vivid spring sky and round at the expansive day, all wind, sunlight, and sauntering groups of people.

"You often walk here?" he continued pleasantly.

"Not so often; I am too hard worked to get a frequent holiday: but Mr. Damier takes us out sometimes."

"Madame Vicaud is at home?"

"Yes; she has pupils, or she would have been with us."

"She is well, I trust?"

"Very well. We shall see you at tea to-morrow?" Claire laid a gently urgent hand upon his arm. "I have been practising the Gluck. I think you will be pleased with it. You will come?"

"With great pleasure, as always," said the Frenchman, but still with something of unwonted gravity beneath his apparent ease.

They parted, and Claire and Damier walked on.

"He was shocked," said Claire, mildly.

Monsieur Daunay might or might not be shocked, but Damier felt that he himself was, more so than he could quite account for. He fixed upon that wholly unnecessary half-untruth of hers; he could not let it pass.

"We have often come here; your mother has only once come with us," he said, with the effect of cold shyness that his displeasure usually took; it always required an effort of distinct courage on Eustace Damier's part to express displeasure.

"There was no necessity for him to know that," she returned, adding, with a laugh: "Now I have shocked both of you--he in his *convenances*, you in your English veracity. I don't mind fibbing in the least, I must tell you."

"Don't you?" His displeasure was now determined to show its definite coolness.

"Not in the least," said Claire, with perfect good humor, "in myself or in others"; and she added, with a little laugh at herself, "unless other people's fibs interfere with mine; but I think that I mind their fibs interfering less than their truths."

Damier resigned himself to feeling that, after all, he was thoroughly prepared for any such developments in Claire; it was the tragedy in the thought of the other Clara that was knocking at his heart.

IX



HE arrival in Paris, where she was to pass some months, of a friend of Damier's, Lady Surfex, a charming, capable woman whose husband was his nearest friend, was the means of casting a further and still more lurid light upon Claire's character and Madame Vicaud's past.

Damier wished to bring Madame Vicaud and Lady Surfex together. He had plans, and was vastly amused to realize that they were of a quite paternal character. These plans did not go beyond the thought that a widening of Claire's life might be an excellent thing for her, and, as a result, a happy thing for her mother. To see Claire well, safely, happily married, would not this be the lifting of a problem from the mother's heart? As yet he had not gone further and told himself that it would leave the mother's heart freer for the contemplation of other problems. Now Claire's chances of a prosperous marriage would certainly be multiplied if he could bring around her and her mother a few such friends as Lady Surfex. He spoke to her, on his first visit to her, of the Vicauds, and of his wish that they might meet. "The charming Clara Chanfrey!" Lady Surfex said. (With what a chime all allusions to Clara Chanfrey always began, to end with such funereal tolling!) "Ah, you make me feel how old I am becoming, for how often in my girlhood I heard my mother speak of her! She always spoke severely. Mother belonged to the old regime, you know--saw things steadily, and saw them whole, perhaps, but rather narrowly, and only one thing at a time. She couldn't take in, as it were, the extenuations of circumstance. And she was a great friend of Lady Chanfrey's. Lady Chanfrey infected all her allies with her own bitterness. But the memory of the daughter's charm came through it. She was like her father, not like her mother. I never liked the little I remember of Lady Chanfrey. But I have heard of Madame Vicaud since I used to hear of her from mother, and, I am sorry to say, more and more sadly."

"All I hear of her is sad," said Damier. "Every echo from her past is a groan!"

"Poor woman!" Lady Surfex mused. "First the awful husband, and then the, to say the least of it, trying daughter."

Damier's heart stiffened. "Trying? In what way--I may ask?"

"Of course you may--you know them so well; and, as I see, your sympathy is all with the mother. Well, I am afraid she is altogether trying, but the instance of which I was thinking deserves a severer adjective. Some friends of mine in Cheshire, nice, quiet people, had always kept more or less in touch with Madame Vicaud during her stormy life. They did not meet, but they sometimes wrote. Mrs. Barnett and she had been friends in girlhood. Claire, when she grew up, went to stay with them. Very beautiful, very clever, singing wonderfully, yet, from the beginning, she struck a false note. And then there was the ugly little story: a young man, Captain Dauncey, fell madly in love with her; they were engaged; and, within hardly a month's time, she jilted him openly and brazenly for a better match. That was only the beginning. Sir Everard Comber was madly in love, too, but Mrs. Barnett told me that they felt that he knew there was no good metal under her glamour; the glamour was so great that he hoodwinked himself. It was tragic to see him trying not to see. And one day he and Mrs. Barnett found Mademoiselle Vicaud engaged in a flirtation in an arbor, indolently allowing an adoring young man to kiss her hand, his arm around her waist. Mrs. Barnett said that it was the most

unpleasant of situations--poor Sir Everard's face, the girl's look of dismay, followed by an instant assumption of coolness. She was able, almost at once, to show a humorous, half-vexed, half-tolerant smile, and to pretend that she expected them to share her playful anger against the hugely embarrassed culprit. She behaved, afterward, very badly about Sir Everard's breaking off the engagement, which he did most delicately and generously. She had no dignity; she was furious, and showed that she was. She even hinted once--only once, but it was enough--at a breach-of-promise suit and damages.

"Madame Vicaud appeared in the midst of the commotion, and quenched in a moment the ugly flicker of vulgarity. The Barnetts guessed that there must have been a terrible scene between the two, but Madame Vicaud carried off her daughter, completely quelled, it seemed. She could not save the situation; she merely made it tragic instead of odious. That is the story," said Lady Surfex, after a pause in which Damier, with a whitened face, kept a sick silence--"only the story, after all, of a vulgar girl who makes her mother piteous.

"I should love to meet Madame Vicaud. She does not know that I know, nor, I think, does the girl. The best thing, I fancy, would be if the girl could be married off to somebody who understood--and didn't mind. Don't you think so? Could we try to help Madame Vicaud like that?"

Damier could not think just now of Claire's future; he was thinking, persistently, of Madame Vicaud--seeing her as a white flower sunken up to the brave and fragile petals in mud. The past clung to her in her daughter--greedy, husband-hunting, lax, and vulgar. What must the tortured mother's heart have felt at this heaping of shame upon her proudest head? How, more and more, he understood, and interpreted, her silences, her reserves!

In a dry voice he said that he could hardly hope for any possible atonement to Madame Vicaud.

"Have I been wrong in telling you--ungenerous?" asked Lady Surfex.

"No; right. It makes one more able to help her; or, at least, to feel where she most needs help. It is only in lifting the daughter that one can help her."

"We will lift her!" said Lady Surfex, with a glance at his absorbed face. "And then, if we do,--right out of the mother's life,--what will she do alone?"

"She would never allow her to be lifted out of her life."

"Well, only in the literal sense of going away to live with her husband."

"Her husband! It seems a difficult thing to find her one!"

"Not so much to find one--she is enchanting in appearance, I hear--as to keep one. But no doubt she is wiser, better, now. And would you, Eustace, live on in Paris indefinitely if the girl married and left her mother alone? Is your friendship so absorbing?"

He was able to look at her now with a smile for her acuteness.

"Quite so absorbing."

X



ET that very evening Damier was to have his freshly emphasized disgust unsettled, as theories are so constantly unsettled by new developments of fact. Claire did not show him a new fact about herself; she merely explained herself a little further, and made it evident that one could not label her "vulgar" and so dispose of her.

It was, curiously, with a keener throb of pity, in the very midst of all his new reasons for disliking her, that he found her alone in the salon, sitting, in her white evening dress, near the open window--opened on the warm spring twilight. There was something of lassitude in her posture, the half-droop of her head as she stared vaguely at the sky, something of passive, patient strength, a creature that no one could love--even--even--he had wondered over it more and more of late--her mother? The wonder never came without a sense of fear for the desecration that such a thought implied in its forcing itself into an inner shrine of sorrow.

His vision in all that concerned the woman he loved had something of a clairvoyant quality. At times he felt himself closing his ears, shutting his eyes, to whispers, glimpses, which as yet he had no right to see or hear.

That evening he was to dine with Madame Vicaud, Claire, and little Sophie; and Claire's gown, he felt in prospective, would make poor Sophie's ill-fitting blouse look odd by contrast in the box at the theater where he was afterward to take them. He had, indeed, never seen the girl look more lovely. His over-early arrival had had as its object the hope of finding, not the daughter, but the mother, alone. Yet, sitting there in the quiet evening air, talking quietly, looking from dim tree-tops outside to Claire's white form and splendid head, he felt that the unasked-for hour had its interest, even its charm. Claire did not charm him, but the mystery of her deep thoughts and shallow heart was as alluring to his mind as the merely pictorial attraction of her beauty to his eye.

"The chief thing," said Claire,--they had been talking in a desultory fashion about life, and in speaking she

stretched out her arm in its transparent sleeve and looked at it with her placid, powerful look, adjusting its fall of lace over her hand,—"the chief thing is to know what you want and to determine to get it. People who do that get what they want, you know--unless circumstances are peculiarly antagonistic." (Damier, in the light of his recent knowledge, found this phrase very pregnant.) "You, for instance, have never known exactly what you wanted; therefore you have got nothing. My father knew that he wanted to paint well--you rarely hear us speak of my father, do you?--though Mamma, you see, has his photograph conspicuously *en evidence* up there, lest I should think too ill of him--or guess how ill she thinks of him herself. I hardly knew my father at all; he was, no doubt, what is called a very bad man, but clever, very clever. He determined to paint well, and he did. You know his pictures. I don't care about pictures, but I suppose there are few of that epoch that can be compared to that Luxembourg canvas of his. Mamma, do you know, never goes to see it. She has never really recovered from the shock poor papa gave her prejudices--the prejudices of the *jeune fille anglaise*. I"--she smiled a little at him, gliding quickly past the silent displeasure that her last words had evoked in his expression--"I have a very restricted field for choice; but I determine to be well dressed. I have small aims, you say; but with me, as yet, circumstances are very antagonistic. I should like many pleasures, but as there is only one I can achieve, I am wise as well as determined; what I do determine comes to pass. And Mamma--yes, I am coming to her. Mamma wanted to be good, and she is, you see, perfectly good. And, even more than that, perhaps, she wanted me to be good, too; but there either her will was too weak or I too wicked--the latter, probably, for she has a strong will."

"Perhaps," said Damier, smiling as he leaned back in his chair, arms folded and knees crossed, listening to her--"perhaps you underestimate her success, or overestimate the Luciferian splendor of your own nature."

"I don't think it is at all splendid," said Claire, composedly; "some wickedness is, I grant you; but do I strike you as affecting that kind?"

"I must own that you don't."

"Or, indeed, as affecting anything either picturesque or desirable?" she pursued.

Again Damier had to own that she affected no such thing.

"Ah, that is well. I should not like you to misinterpret me," said Claire. "I make no poses." And after a slight pause in which he wondered anew over her, she added: "I merely like enjoyment better than anything else in the world."

"Yours, you know, is a very old philosophy--a universe of will and enjoyment; but one must have a great deal of the former to attain the latter in a world of so many clashing aims," said Damier.

"Yes, one must."

"And not the highest type of will. The world, so seen, is a terrible one."

"Do you think so?" Her look, from the sky, drifted lazily down to him.

"Don't you?"

"No; I think it wonderful, entralling, if one attains one's aims; it is all beautiful, even the suffering--if one avoids suffering one's self."

"You are an esthete--"

While safe beneath the roof,
To hear with drowsy ear the splash of rain."

"Oh, better than rain--the tempest!"

"And how can one avoid suffering, pray?"

"*Mais*,"--Claire had a tolerant smile for his naivete,--"by staying under the roof, laughing round the fire. Mamma, you see, would be darting out continually into the storm."

"Bringing other people back to shelter."

"And crowding us uncomfortably round the fire, getting the rest of us wet!" smiled Claire. "For a case in point--don't you find Sophie a bore? She was going to commit suicide when Mamma, through something Miss Vibert said, found her. Yes, I assure you, the charcoal was lit--her last sous spent on it. And really, do you know, I think it would have been a wise thing. Don't be too much horrified at my heartlessness. I mean that Sophie will never enjoy herself; nothing in this world will ever satisfy her. When she has enough to eat she can realize more clearly her higher wants. And--I don't want to seem more ungenerous than I am, but, as a result, we have less to eat ourselves. Don't look so stony; I am not really *un mauvais coeur*. I would willingly dot Sophie, buy her the best husband procurable if I had the money; but husbands and houses and money wouldn't make Sophie comfortable, and I don't really see that much is gained by making two people less so in order to insure the survival of one unfit little Pole."

"I need hardly tell you that I don't share the ruthless materialism of that creed. Who, my dear young woman, are you, to pronounce on Sophie's unfitness, and to decide that you, rather than she, have a right to survival?"

Claire looked at him for a moment with a smile unresentful and yet rueful.

"How often you surprise me," she said, "and how often you make me feel that I don't, even yet, quite understand"

you! It is so difficult to realize that a person so comprehending can at the same time be so rigid. With you *tout comprendre* is not *tout pardonner*."

"By no means," Damier owned, unable to repress a smile.

"Well, I would far rather have you understand me completely, even if you can't forgive. I told you that I was wicked; one good point I have: I never pretend to be better than I am."

"And one better point you have, and that is that you are better than you know." Damier spoke lightly, but at the moment he believed what he spoke.

Claire smiled without replying, and said, after a little silence:

"Of course you have seen how good Mamma is. You both of you have a moral perfume, and recognize it in each other. I puzzle and worry her so because I won't suffer, won't go out of my life into other people's. You asked me how one could avoid suffering; really, for the most part, it is very easy to avoid. Sympathy is the fatal thing: *to suffer with*--why should one? It is a mere increasing of the suffering in the world, if one comes to think of it. The wise thing is to concentrate one's self--to bring things to one's self; but it is that wisdom that Mamma will not understand in me."

Damier made no comment on these assertions, and Claire, as if she had expected none, as if, indeed, she were expounding herself and her mother for her own benefit as well as his, went on:

"She is very energetic, too, Mamma, as energetic as I am, but in a different way. She is always striving--against things; I wait. Even if she can't see distinctly at what she is aiming, she is always aiming at something; I never aim unless I see something to aim at."

"What things do you aim at?" he now asked.

"Oh--you know; things that Mamma despises--things that you too despise, perhaps, but that, at all events, you understand." He could not quite interpret the glance that rested upon him. "And Mamma's aims--I suppose you don't care to hear what I think of them?"

"On the contrary, for you think very clearly. But I know what she has aimed at. What has she attained?"

He asked himself the question, indeed, with an inner lamentation for the one evident, the one tragic failure.

"Well,"--Claire clasped her hands behind her head and looked out of the window,--"for one thing, she has kept herself--she hasn't attained it: that wasn't needful--*tres grande dame*. She has always made herself a social milieu congenial to her, or gone without one. For herself she would not choose and exclude so carefully; but I complicate Mamma's spontaneous impulses. The social milieu has always been to her a soil in which to try to grow my soul; that is why she is so careful about the soil; if it were not for me she would probably choose the stoniest and ugliest, and beautify it by blooming in it, since her soul is strong and beneficent."

Half repelled and half attracted as Damier had been, it was now with more of attraction than repulsion that he listened, an attraction that had many sources. That she should so finely appreciate her mother was one. It was touching--meant to be so, perhaps, for even in his attraction he had these moments of doubt; but a sincerity that could paint herself so unbecomingly and her mother so beautifully was a new revelation of her frankness. There was attraction, too, though of a mingled quality, in her strength and in her apparent indifference to his impression of her. These were better things than the glamour; yet that, too, he felt, as when she turned her eyes on him and said that the world was beautiful. At such moments something joyous and conscienceless in him responded to her, half intellectual comprehension and half mere flesh and blood. It was a little swirl of emotion that his soul, calm and disdainfully aloof, could look down on and observe, in no danger of being shaken by it; but it did swirl through him like a tremulous coil of Venusberg music; and Claire, in her transparent white, with her heavy braids and grave, shining eyes, gleamed at such moments with the baleful beauty of the eternal siren. As long as one was human something human in one must respond to that siren call. Even now, when he was feeling, with some bewilderment, better things in her, the glamour looking from her eyes, breathing from her serious lips, confused and troubled the new impulse of trust and pity. Half lightly, half sadly, yet with a very gentle kindness, he said to her: "Strong enough to make you flower some day, let us believe"; and, as silently she still gazed upon him: "That you should recognize beauty is already a flower, you know."

Still leaning back, her arms behind her head, still looking at him, Claire now said: "I owe that flower, not to her, but to you."

He stared for a moment, not comprehending.

"You mean that you see her, appreciate her, through my sight, my appreciation?"

"Yes--in a sense, I mean that."

"But," said Damier, smiling, "you owe it to her that there is something beautiful to see."

He was mystified, not quite trusting, yet touched.

Claire, without moving, turned her eyes on the door. "Here she is," she said; and as her mother entered, she added, in the lowest voice above a whisper, so vaguely that it was like a fragrant perturbing influence breathing from the twilight and the spring air:

"I like to owe all my flowers to you."

Already, as he rose to greet the mother, he liked the daughter less.

Madame Vicaud, in her black dress, with flowing white about her wrists and throat,—a throat erect and beautiful,—had closed the door softly behind her, and as she came toward him, Damier, involuntarily carrying further his Venusberg simile of some moments before, thought of an Elizabeth bringing peace and radiance; yet there was, too, a gravity in her gaze, a quick intentness that went swiftly from her daughter to him. Then the smile and the lightness masked her. She took his hand.

"Has not Sophie come yet? Of what have you been talking?"

"Of life, and how to live it," laughed Damier.

"Wise young people! Was it a contest of sublimities?" Madame Vicaud laid down the evening wrap she had brought in, and, it seemed to Damier, averted her face from him as she took up a box of matches.

"Do I ever fight under the banner of sublimity, Mamma?" Claire inquired, looking out of the window, showing once more her accustomed lassitude and detachment. "I leave those becoming colors to you—and to Mr. Damier."

"But don't, even in jest, my dear, assume always the unbecoming ones," Madame Vicaud replied, still with all her lightness, and bending, her face still averted, to strike a match. "You have discovered, have you not, Mr. Damier, that it is difficult for Claire to assume the virtues that she has?"

She moved about the room, lighting the candles on the mantelpiece and on the cabinet where her husband's portrait stood; and Damier, watching the swift blackness of her girlish figure, the slender white of her uplifted hand,—the black more black, the white more white, as the radiance slowly grew in the dim room,—still fancied that she was mastering some emotion, hiding from him some sudden agitation. There was a faint flush on her face as she turned, gaily and sweetly, blowing out and tossing away her match, to welcome Sophie.

XI



AMIER was well aware that some trivial and purely subjective fancy or emotion may oddly color and distort reality for one, and he was not quite able to decide whether change there really were in Madame Vicaud, or whether it was only in his imagination that the difference he had fancied in her on that evening was continued during the following days. She seemed, in her relations with him, more intimate and yet more effaced; and he was almost sure—or was it only the reflection of his own solicitude cast upon her?—that she watched him, speculated upon him, more than at any time in their friendship, and always with that controlled agitation. It was almost as if she guessed his new knowledge and understanding of her sorrows and humiliations; as if she wondered how much he knew, and how much he was going to let her see that he knew. And if she seemed more intimate yet more effaced, Claire, for a little while at all events, was less intimate yet more in evidence. He had the rather uncomfortable feeling that Claire had implied on that evening more than he had been able to understand; that she had laid upon him some responsibility that he really never had undertaken to accept: but she did not emphasize it further, seemed content to let it remain indefinitely apprehended by him, and the slight discomfort and perplexity he had felt passed from his mind, leaving only in a half-conscious undercurrent the mood of vague doubt and withdrawal, mingling with a deeper pity, a deeper desire to help—for her own sake now as well as for her mother's.

It was odd, this hint of withdrawal and formality, in the midst of a greater kindness, when Claire occupied so much more conspicuously the foreground. She was now always with her mother; was a third in all talks and readings, listening, with eyes almost ironically vacant, her hands lying beautifully indolent in her lap, while Damier read aloud and her mother sewed. Claire did not seem to have stepped forward, but her mother seemed to have stepped back; and from the background—a mysterious one to his odd, new apprehension of things—she smiled more tenderly than before, and with yet a tremor, an intentness, as though expecting him to understand more than she could look.

And all this might be merely an emotional color in his own outlook on unchanged facts, but the color certainly was there, making a faintly tinted difference over all the mental landscape.

It was during the first days of this dim perplexity that he found himself alone once more with Madame Vicaud. He had outstayed all her guests on a Tuesday afternoon, and, the Viberts having taken Claire back to dine with them, Madame Vicaud asked the young man to share her solitude.

Now, when they were alone, and while he sat cutting the leaves of a new book they were to read together, she went about the room, putting things back in their places, closing the piano—a little restless in her restoration of composure to the room.

Presently she came to him, stood beside him, looking down at the book. "Always friends, you know," she said, putting a hand on his shoulder and speaking lightly, almost incidentally.

"Why not?" Damier asked, looking up at her.

"Indeed, why not?" she returned, smiling. "Nothing, I hope, would ever change our friendship."

"Nothing could." She stood silently beside him, looking down, not at him, but at the volume of essays, and he added: "You will tell me if you are ever in any trouble or sorrow where I could help you, if ever so little?"

"Oh, yes; I will tell you," she answered, still with the lightness that contrasted with the tremor of Damier's voice.

Moving away, she asked him, presently, if he did not think that Claire's singing that afternoon had been very intelligent. She had sung Orfeo's song of search and supplication through Hades, her mother accompanying her on the harp. Damier had not altogether cared for Claire's interpretation of the song. Claire's voice had thrown an enchantment around a rather over-emotional, yet an untender, conception of it.

"Her voice is glorious," he said.

"The song is to me one of the most beautiful parts of the opera," said Madame Vicaud; "that lonely, steadfast love, throbbing onward, through horror."

"Ah," was on Damier's lips, "you have said what she could not sing"; but he had long felt that appreciation of Claire was the greatest pleasure he could give to her mother, and depreciation the greatest pain. He therefore sat silently looking at her, leaning forward, his hands clasped around the idle book-cutter; and Madame Vicaud, with all her calm, went on presently, taking up her sewing as she sat near the lamp with its plain green shade: "Do you think Claire's life very gray--very dreary?"

The question from one who, on this subject of her daughter's upbringing, seemed always inflexibly sure of her own aims, surprised Damier, and its chiming with his own recent thoughts disturbed him. After all, was, perhaps, Claire's gray life an explanation, in one sense, of her ugly clutch at any brightness? Yet the serenity, the sweet, if laborious, dignity of the place her mother had made for her in life, hardly allowed the mitigating supposition. Claire's life was really neither gray nor dreary. He paused, however, for a long time before saying: "From her point of view it probably is."

"I should have liked to give her a larger life, a life of more opportunity, more gaiety. I feel the narrowness of her path as keenly as she does. Not that Claire complains."

"You have given her your best. How could she complain?" Damier was not able quite to restrain the resentment he felt at the idea of Claire complaining.

"Ah, I could not blame her if she did," said Madame Vicaud, her quiet eyes on her work, "for mothers personify circumstance to children; we are symbols, to them, of baffling, cramping fate; very often, and very naturally, we are fate's whipping-boys: and when one is a young and talented and beautiful woman whose youth is passing in giving lessons, in seeing people who seldom interest or amuse her, fate must often seem to deserve blows."

Damier, in the surge of his comprehension,--of which she must be so ignorant and at which perhaps she yet guessed,--longed to throw himself at her knees: her pity for Claire equaled, surpassed his own; and he had--not blaming her for it, thinking it, indeed, the penalty of her superiority--thought her unconscious of Claire's pathos.

"You deepen your shadows too much," he said; "for a daughter more like yourself your life would not be a narrow one." He paused, for, though she did not lift her eyes, a faint flush passed over Madame Vicaud's face.

"I see all your efforts to widen it," he went on, hurrying away from what he felt to have been an unfortunate comparison, "the flowers you strew: intellectual, artistic interests, friends that you hope she may find congenial, your delightful teas."

"Oh--our teas!" Madame Vicaud interrupted, smiling with a rather satirical playfulness. "No; our delightful and 'cultured' little teas can hardly atone to Claire. She should have the gaiety, the variety, the colored experience that I had in my youth. I can well imagine that to Claire's palate the nourishment I offer her is rather tasteless. She needs excitement, admiration, appreciation, an outlet for her energy, her intelligence."

Damier seized the opportunity--it was, he thought, very propitious--again to ask her when he might bring some of his friends in Paris to see her, suggesting that so Claire's social diet might be pleasantly diversified. Madame Vicaud had more than once evaded--gracefully, kindly, and decisively--all question of renewing broken ties with her country-people, or making new ones, and now, again, she slightly flushed, as though for a moment finding him tactless and inopportune; but only for a moment: when she lifted her eyes to him, it was with all their quiet confidence of gaze.

"I hardly know that that would be for Claire's happiness or good. One must have the means of widening one's environment if it is to be with comfort to one's self. Our means are too limited to be diffused over a larger area. You must not forget, my friend, that we are very poor. I do not like accepting where I can offer nothing."

"That is a false though a charming delicacy," said Damier. "You give yourself; and I hope you won't refuse to now, for I have almost promised you to Lady Surfex; she is very anxious to meet you."

Madame Vicaud was silent for some moments, her eyes downcast to the work where she put firm, rapid stitches; then, in a voice that had suddenly grown icy, "Her mother did not recognize me one day, years ago, when she met me walking with my husband," she said.

It was now Damier's turn to flush. He nerved himself, after a moment, to say:

"But this is not the mother."

"No; and my husband is dead: otherwise the wish to meet me would not overcome that disability."

"You are a little unjust, my dearest friend," said the young man.

"I know the world," she replied; but she raised her eyes in saying it, and looked at him with a sad kindness that separated him from the world she knew. "I don't judge it--only see it as it is. It seeks happiness, it avoids unhappiness. To be unfortunate is to be lost, in its eyes--to sink from sight. To be fortunate is to have a radiance around one; and the world seeks radiance."

After looking at him she again bent her eyes, and still sewed on while she spoke. "When I needed it, it abandoned me. When I was in the dark, it did not look for me. I strayed--through stubborn folly, perhaps; perhaps, too, through generous ignorance--into a quicksand, and not a hand was held out to me. I was allowed to sink; I was declassée, I am declassée, in the eyes of all of those who were of my world." The cold flame of a long resentment burned in her steady voice. "I have tested average human nature," she resumed, after a slight pause, in which he saw her breast heave slowly. "It is a severe test, I own; but, after it, it is with difficulty that I can trust again. I have no wish to know people who, if I were in dire straits, would pass over on the other side of the way. The few friends I have I have proved--the comtesse, Madame Depressier, Lady Vibert, Monsieur Daunay,--who had much to bear from my husband,--Sophie; there are a few more, very few; and then, you, my friend."

She stopped sewing--the rapid movements of her hand had been almost automatic--and looked at him, her work falling to her knee. "Come here," she said, holding out her hand to him, "come here. Have I seemed harsh to you?" Her sudden smile dwelt on him with a divine sweetness. "I am harsh--but not to you."

Damier, with an eagerness almost pathetically boyish, had sprung to her side, and she took his hand, smiling up at him. "Not to you. You have enlarged my trust--need I say how much? Don't ask me to alloy it with dubious admixtures."

His love for her was yet so founded on a sort of sacred fear that at this moment of delicious happiness he did not dare to stoop and confess all with a lover's kiss upon her hair, did not even dare to look a confession of more than a responsive affection.

She pressed his hand, still smiling at him, and then, resuming her sewing, "Sit near me," she said, "so I can see that you are not fancying that I am harsh with you!"

At such moments he could see in her eyes, that caressed one, made sweetest amends to one, touches of what must once have been enchanting roguishness.

"But I am still going to risk your harshness," he said; "I am still going to ask you to let your trust in me include my friend. She would stand tests. Won't you take my word for it?"

"I believe that I would take your word for anything."

"And," said Damier, looking his thanks, "all you say is true. I don't want to justify man's ways to man; and yet ordinary human nature, with its almost inevitable self-regarding instinct, its climb toward happiness, its ugly struggle for successful attainment of it, is more forgetful than cruel toward unhappiness. One must be patient with it; one must remember that only the exceptional natures can rise above that primitive instinct. To take the other road is to embrace the sacrifice of all the second-rate joys--the only real joys to the average human being. One must either yield to the instinct or fight it, and most people are too lazy, too skeptical of other than apparent good, to do that. And then you must remember--I must, for how often I have struggled with these thoughts!--that misfortune is a mask, a disguise. One can't be recognized and known when one wears it; one can't show one's self; if one could there would perhaps be responses. People are base--most of them are base, perhaps; but sometimes they are only blind or stupid."

"I sometimes think that I am all three," said Madame Vicaud, after a little pause. "Misfortune's distorting mask has become in me an actuality. I am perhaps blinded; certainly, as I told you, warped and hardened. I used not to be so; it was, I suppose, latent in me: I could not bear the fiery ordeal; the good shriveled and the dross remained."

She spoke with a full gravity, no hint of plaintive self-pity, no appeal for contradiction, in her voice; yet, on raising her saddened eyes, she had to smile when she met his look.

"I see," she said, "that you are determined to take me at your own valuation, not at mine."

She turned the talk after that; she could seldom be led to talk of herself, and not until dinner was over, not until, after it, he had read to her for an hour, did she return to its subject. Then it was when he rose to go that, giving him her hand in farewell, she said:

"Bring your friend; I shall be glad to see her."

XII

It was as a result of this new friendship, which rapidly spread into half a dozen, that Damier, who seemed to himself to be walking among echoes of the past and whispered prophecies of the future, received yet another hint, another faint

I yet significant revelation, of Madame Vicaud's attitude toward her daughter.

In the more or less fluctuating social world of English Paris, the beautiful and distinguished mother and her beautiful and effective daughter struck a novel and quite resounding note,—too resounding for Madame Vicaud's taste, Damier at once felt,—a note well sustained by a harmony so decisive as Lady Surfex, Mrs. Wallingham (another new friend), and Damier himself. That Madame Vicaud disliked feeling herself a note sustained by any harmony, Damier guessed. That she mastered the dislike for his sake, he knew. He knew that she would do a great deal for his sake—a great deal for Lady Surfex, too. She and Lady Surfex liked each other absolutely. But it was through Lady Surfex, and her secret alliance with Damier, that the problem of Claire, instead of being unraveled, was the more deeply involved. Claire evidently enjoyed this new phase of life. She had now quite frequent opportunities for displaying her gowns and her voice and her dancing at receptions and balls. Yet, already, among her new entourage, she had shown her affinity with its less desirable members. A rich, fashionable, and rather tawdry Englishwoman took a great fancy to her; and Mrs. Jefferies was the sister of a fashionable and tawdry brother, Lord Epsil, who at once manifested a decided interest in the red-haired beauty, pronounced her to be like Sodoma's Judith, and made her mother's withdrawal of her from his company the more noticeable by his persistent seeking of hers.

"It is really too bad," Lady Surfex said to Damier. "She flirts outrageously with the man—if one can call that indolent tolerance flirting. I hope that she realizes that he is a bad lot. From a purely worldly point of view he can be of no advantage to her. He is married and has not a nice reputation."

"She may not realize it, she may be indifferent to it; but her mother realizes and is not indifferent."

"And we wanted to spare her such watchfulness!" sighed Lady Surfex.

"It seems that we can spare her nothing," Damier replied. At the same time he felt that Claire could be accused of nothing worse than too great a tolerance. Once or twice she spoke to him of Lord Epsil with half-mocking insight. "He is not like you," she said; "the difference amuses me." Claire's intelligence was, after all, her best safeguard in all that did not touch matters of delicate taste, and Damier's only way of helping her mother was to watch with her—to constitute himself a sort of elder brother in his attitude toward Claire, and to try, by being much with Claire himself, to make Lord Epsil's wish to be with her less able to manifest itself.

The faint yet significant hint of what Madame Vicaud's real feelings toward her daughter were came to him one evening at a dance, when she sat beside Lady Surfex, more beautiful, with her white face, her thick gray hair, in the dignity of her black dress, than any other woman there. He then saw on her face, as, fanning herself slowly, her head a little bent, she watched Claire dance, a concentration of the somberness it sometimes showed. It was a moment only of unconscious revelation; in another she had turned, with her quiet and facile gaiety, to a laughing comment of her companion's. But Damier, following that momentary brooding look, saw in a flash its interpretation on the daughter's face. Claire was dancing, exquisitely dressed, calm, competent, complacent, as noticeable and as graceful a figure as any in the room. And yet—he had felt it from the first, but never so clearly, so tragically, as through that somber maternal gaze—Claire was ill-bred. It was that her mother should see her so that made the revelation.

The somberness was not a fear of what others thought; she was, he knew, almost arrogantly indifferent to what people thought: it was what she herself thought that had gloomed her brow. And that she should see, should recognize, that affection should not mercifully have blinded her, filled Damier with a sort of consternation. Again all the ugly visions of Claire crossed his mind, and now, indeed, the mother stood transfixed beside them, for she, too, saw such visions. Ill-bred was a trivial, mitigating word.

He realized that this very quality—call it what one would—in Claire was the cause of her effectiveness, the reason, too, that his hopes for her would probably remain unfulfilled.

She was a woman upon whom, when she entered a room, all men's eyes turned. Her beauty was like the deep, half-triumphant, half-ominous note of brazen instruments. But she was not a woman that men of Madame Vicaud's world, of Lady Surfex's world, would care to marry. Had she been an heiress,—and she was of the type that one associates with unfragrant and recent wealth,—had it not been for her poverty, her essential obscurity, she would no doubt have been enrolled among the powerful young women who are watched with admiring envy as they advance toward a luminous match. Claire had quite the manner of placid advance, quite the manner (and how detestable to her mother the manner must be!) of a young woman bent upon "getting on." But though her indolent self-assurance made people give way before her, made her talked of and something of a personage, she was, as a result of her launching, far more likely to become notorious than eminent. Any success of Claire's must, like herself, be ill-bred, tainted.

That Claire felt this, he doubted, or even that, if felt, she would mind; but that Madame Vicaud felt it he now agonized in knowing. And she had asked for her daughter neither eminence nor a luminous match; she had, he now saw, been glad to shield her with obscurity. That she might become notorious, fulfil herself completely in so becoming, would be the bitterest drop in her cup that fate could reserve for her.

If she dreaded it, she kept, at all events, a stoic's calm above the dread. And her restrictions, delicate, subtle, unemphasized, were about Claire on every side; her unobtrusive watchfulness was constantly upon her. With a

cheerful firmness she held Claire to her duty of earning, as Claire had said, "the butter for her bread," and thwarted, without seeming to thwart, many of her social opportunities. Damier saw, though only faintly, under the surface of appearance her dexterity kept smooth, the constant drama of the conflict, a conflict that never became open or avowed. He saw that Madame Vicaud's cleverness was so great that even Claire hardly knew that there was a conflict; but after what he had seen in the mother's eyes on the night of the dance, he understood, at least, for what she was fighting.

Damier still felt the subtle change in his relations with Claire and Madame Vicaud, and he had by this time adapted himself to it--adapted himself to seeing Claire more constantly, seeing Madame Vicaud more rarely alone, encouraged as he was in this sacrifice by the strong impression that in so doing he was pleasing her, and was emphasizing that silent, yet growing, nearness and intimacy.

The silence was part of her extreme delicacy, and of her fineness of perception; it showed that his brotherly attitude toward Claire was what she had hoped for, and it was almost maternal in its sweetness of recognition to him, its loyalty of speechlessness toward the other child, the child that--he knew it so clearly now--could only give her profoundest pain; such a silence would a mother keep with the child that gave her happiness.

He had never more strongly felt this queer medley of influences than on one warm summer evening when he and Madame Vicaud sat outside the salon on the high balcony that overlooked the garden. They had dined,--he and Monsieur Daunay, and Claire and her mother,--and now Claire and Monsieur Daunay had established themselves at the piano in the distant end of the salon, the pale radiance of two candles enveloping them and deepening the half-gloom in the room's wide spaces.

Outside the twilight lingered, though beneath them the June foliage made mysteries of gloom; the warm breathing of the summer ascended in fragrance from still branches; the faint stars above shone in a pale sky.

They were both very silent, Damier looking at her, and she with eyes musingly downcast to the trees. Her face, he thought, showed a peculiarly deep contentment; more than that, perhaps: for he still felt the whisper of a mystery; still felt, in all the peace between them, a hint of perplexity; still divined that, though she was tranquil, her tranquillity had been wrested from some struggle,--a struggle that she had hidden from him,--as though she had yielded something with pain, even though, now, she was satisfied. Patience as much as tranquillity was upon her lips and brow; and yet he knew that, insensibly, she had come to lean upon the new strength he brought into her life; that she depended upon him, though she confided so little; that soon, very soon, her eyes must answer the unspoken question in his, and solve, in the answer, all mysteries. Indeed, he said to himself that, Claire's harassing problem all unsolved, he could not wait much longer; he must know just where he stood with her, and tell her where he wished to stand. Now, as they sat there, listening to Claire's richly emotional voice,--a voice that expressed so much more than it felt,--it was Claire's voice, just as it was the thought of Claire, that disturbed the peace, jarred upon the aspiration of his thoughts. Its beauty seemed to embroider the chaste and dreaming stillness with an arabesque of opulent curves and flaunting tendrils. Our imaginative young man could almost see a whiteness invaded by urgent waves of purple and rose and gold. He stirred, shifted his position involuntarily and uneasily--wished Claire would stop singing; her voice curiously irritated him.

Madame Vicaud sat with her back to the open window, and Damier, beside her, could not see into the room without turning his head. He did happen, however, to turn his head during a humming pause. Monsieur Daunay's hands were still held on the last chord, while, as Damier thought, he demonstrated to Claire some improvement in her rendering of the note that had just soared above it. But as he turned lazily to glance at them, Damier saw a strange, an unexpected thing, a thing poignantly disagreeable to him. Monsieur Daunay's face, vividly illuminated, was upturned to Claire's; he was speaking below his breath, under cover of the humming chord, and with a look of humble yet reproachful entreaty. Claire, a swift finger on her lips as she bent to the music, had a glance for the window, and Damier's eyes of astonishment and dismay met hers. He looked away abruptly--too abruptly for a successful controlling of the dismay and astonishment, for he found Madame Vicaud's eyes upon him, and he saw in a moment that they had been upon him during the swift incident--eyes filled with wonder and with an ignorant yet intense fear. Memories of another scene, hand-kissings in an arbor, flashed upon him, and he knew her thoughts. She met his look--as empty as he could make it--for a long moment; but after it she did not, also, glance into the room, where the song now flowed with an almost exaggerated spirit. Wrapping her arms more closely in her light shawl, she sat quite silent, the effort to control, to master the crowding of her surmises apparent in her rigidly still profile. Damier guessed that the surmises must, inevitably, suspect Claire, not Monsieur Daunay. In justice to Claire, after the involuntary silence of his dismay, he could not longer be silent. After all, and he drew a long breath in realizing it, Claire's past shadowed perhaps too deeply her present; after all, the fact was not so alarming.

"Have you never suspected," he said, "that Monsieur Daunay cares for Claire?"

She did not reply; turning a wan face upon him, her eyes still averted, she shook her head in a helpless negation of all such knowledge.

"Don't be distressed," said Damier, terribly afraid that he too much showed his own distress; "it is unfortunate for him, and wrong of him to keep such feeling from you; I happened just now to see its revelation in his face as he looked

at Claire."

Madame Vicaud, for another moment, said nothing, struggling, he knew, with those awakened memories--or were they not always awake, clutching at her?

"He may care for Claire," she then said faintly, "but she cannot care for him; that--you know--is impossible."

"Only enough, I am sure, to wish to shield him."

"I could never have suspected. He is an old friend, a trusted friend. I must speak to him."

"Let me speak to him--may I? I will walk home with him to-night."

A certain relief in Madame Vicaud was taking a long, deep breath, and nothing could more clearly have assured him of the position he held in her eyes than the half-hesitating yet half-assenting consideration she gave to his rather odd proposal.

"But," she said, "will he not wonder--by what right--"

"I speak? By the right of my fondness for you."

"And for Claire, yes," said Madame Vicaud, thoughtfully.

Damier had not at all intended to imply this amendment, especially at a moment when he was so sure of not being at all fond of Claire; yet the trust of her inclusion was so unconscious of possible contradiction that he could not trouble it.

"But what will you say?" she went on. "Any reproach should come from me; and what reproach could you make? I cannot think he is more than piteous; people fall in love with Claire--often."

Damier was feeling that if, by chance, Monsieur Daunay were more than piteous, he must stand between Madame Vicaud and the discovery.

"I will be all discretion--all delicacy. I will only say that I was the unsuspecting, the involuntary witness of the incident; and that, as your friend, almost, I might say,"--he hesitated, seeking a forcible word in place of the one he dared not use,--"your son, I must ask him how much Claire knows of it--how far it should interfere with your confidence in him."

She was silent for a long moment, her head still turned from him to a silhouetted profile against the sky; it was now so much darker that he could see little more than its vague black and white, yet he thought that, in her stillness, she flushed deeply. In her voice, when she spoke, there was the steadiness that nerves itself over a tremor; yet there was, too, a greater relief. "Well," she said. The word assented to all he asked. She did not look at him again, and presently, as the music had ceased, rose and went into the room. Claire was pointing out to Monsieur Daunay a picture in a magazine, apparently all placidity; but in a moment near the parting, while Madame Vicaud, with an equal calm, stood speaking to Monsieur Daunay near the piano, Claire said to Damier, quietly but intently:

"You have not betrayed me to Mamma?"

"Betrayed you?" Damier questioned, ice in his voice.

"Him, rather," she amended. "Not that there is anything to betray, only Mamma would find it so shocking that a married man should be in love with me; he is so *bete*--Monsieur Daunay--to have forgotten that you were out there."

"I must tell you that your mother guessed that I had seen something. I told her what I had seen, that he loved you, though not that you seemed to accept his love."

For a moment she gazed into his eyes, at first with a gravity that studied him, and then with a light effrontery. "Accept it! *par exemple!*" she exclaimed, and she put her hand on his arm with a half-caressing reassurance. "Set your mind at rest! I am only sorry for him. Meet me to-morrow morning at ten at the Porte Dauphine; we can have a little walk in the Bois. I want to tell you all about it."

Monsieur Daunay was going, and Damier, as he turned from Claire, met Madame Vicaud's eyes. Their wide, dark gaze was, for the instant in which she let him see it, piteous and almost wild. He interpreted their fear, though he could not quite define their question. All the mother was in them. Did he despise her child, as others did? He mustered his bravest, most gravely confident smile, in answer to them, as he pressed her hand in parting. For another instant they met his, saw his smile, and answered it with a look tragically grateful in one so proud. He had never stood so near her as at that moment.

Damier went out with the Frenchman, and once in the cool, dim street, he dashed at the subject: "Monsieur Daunay, I must at once tell you that inadvertently this evening, through your own indiscretion, I discovered your secret. You are a married man; you are Madame Vicaud's trusted friend; and you love her daughter."

Monsieur Daunay stopped short in the street, exasperation rather than embarrassment in his face. He fixed Damier with very steady and very hostile eyes.

"And what then?" he asked.

"You have a perfect right," said Damier, "to ask what business it is of mine, and I can only answer that I, too, am a trusted friend of Madame Vicaud's, and, Monsieur Daunay, a friend whom she can trust."

"Ah, Monsieur Damier, you have--I do not deny it--more rights than I, who have none," said Daunay, in a voice the bitterness of which was a revelation to Damier. "I have no rights, only misfortunes. Why not add that you are Madame Vicaud's trusted friend, and that you, too, love her daughter?"

Damier felt a relief disproportionate, he realized, to any suspicions he had allowed himself to recognize. The atmosphere, after the unexpected thunderclap, was immensely cleared. Monsieur Daunay was jealous, and Monsieur Daunay was evidently piteous only. With all the vigor of a sudden release from bondage, he exclaimed: "You are utterly mistaken; I have no such rights: I do not love Mademoiselle Vicaud."

"What do you say?" Monsieur Daunay's astonishment was almost blank.

"I do not love her in the very least."

"Then," stammered the Frenchman, "we are not rivals? You can then pity me--I am jealous with none of the rights of jealousy."

"None of the rights?" Damier eyed him.

"None, monsieur; Madame Vicaud's trust in me is not unfounded," said Monsieur Daunay, with something of a slightly ludicrous grandiloquence.

"Yet Mademoiselle Vicaud knows of your attachment."

"I never declared it; she guessed it, perhaps inevitably." They were walking on again, and he shrugged his shoulders. "*Que voulez-vous?* She has a certain tenderness for me that gives perception, and I adore her--but adore her, you understand." Damier was understanding and not at all disliking this victim of the glamour--or, was it not deeper than that? Something in the Frenchman's voice touched him. Would Claire ever arouse a deeper affection than this? Not only had she cast her glamour upon him: he evidently loved her--"but adore her, you understand," as he had said in his expressive French.

His hands clasped behind him, Monsieur Daunay, with now a reminiscent confidence, shook his head and sighed profoundly. "*Que voulez-vous?*" he repeated. "Since her girlhood it has been with me a hidden passion. *Ce que j'ai souffert!*" He showed no antagonism now, no resentment; Damier could but be grateful.

"Claire has not suffered through me," he went on. "She allows me to love her, but she knows that she is free. What can I claim?--an honorable man, and shackled. Yet--I have always hoped that she might, generously and nobly, keep an unclaimed faith with me. I have claimed none, and yet she has assured me that, as yet, she loves no other. I have needed the assurance of late--I confess it. Your apparent courtship I could not reproach her with,--though it tore my heart,--but her permission of this ill-omened Lord Epsil's attentions filled me with consternation; I have felt myself justified in reproaching her for her *legerete* in regard to this."

"But," said Damier, after a slight pause, "this unclaimed faith--how do you expect her to keep it?"

There was a touch of embarrassment in Monsieur Daunay's voice as he answered: "My wife and I have, for years, been on most unfortunate terms; I have no reproaches to address myself on her account. She is a confirmed invalid, and of late her condition has been critical. One must not hope for certain contingencies--one must not, indeed, admit the thought of them too often; but--if they did arise--"

"I see," said Damier, gravely; "you could claim her. It is, indeed, a most unpleasant contingency. Would it not be for Claire's happiness if you were not to see her again until it arose?"


"Ah, no," said Daunay, with something of weariness; "ah, no; her happiness is not involved. Claire--I speak frankly; my affection for her has never blinded me--Claire is not easily made unhappy by her sympathies. It is only myself I hurt by remaining near her, by seeing her, as I constantly imagine, on the point of abandoning me. But to leave her--you ask of me more than I am capable of doing."

Later, when Damier told him of Madame Vicaud's knowledge of the situation, Monsieur Daunay heaved another, not regretful, sigh.

"It is as well. I will say to her what I have said to you. She will be generous; she will understand."

Damier felt oddly, when he parted with him, that he might trust Monsieur Daunay, but that he trusted Claire less than ever.

XIII

EXT day, as Damier waited near the Porte Dauphine for Claire, he could reflect on his really parental situation, but feeling more the irritation than the humor of it. After all, where was his authority for this meddling? Why should they submit to it? and why, as a result, should he submit to the hearing of Claire's coming self-justification? He could spare Madame Vicaud nothing by it, since she knew all that there was to know--and since it was better that she should know it. He had written to her the night before, on reaching his hotel, and told her of the talk with Monsieur Daunay and of the impression it had made upon

him. He wondered if she had, meanwhile, had an equally appeasing talk with Claire.

This young woman appeared quite punctually, walking at a leisurely pace along the sanded path, where the full summer foliage cast flickering purple shadows. Claire was all in white, white that fluttered about her as she walked; her hat, tilted over her eyes, had white wings--like a Valkyrie's summer helmet; her white parasol made a shadowed halo behind her head. As she approached him she looked at him steadily, with something whimsical, quizzical in her gaze, and her first words showed no wish to beat about the bush.

"You talked to him last night? I talked a little to Mamma, or rather she talked to me. I soon satisfied her that I didn't feel for him, *pas grand comme ca d'amour*." Claire indicated the smallness she negated by a quarter of an inch of finger-tip. "And I think I can soon satisfy you, too," she added. "He told you everything?"

"Everything."

"And you are terribly shocked that an unmarried young woman should take money from a married man who is in love with her? Must I assure you that our relations are absolutely innocent?"

In his stupefaction, Damier could hardly have said whether her first statement or the coolness of her second remark--its forestalling of a suspicion she took for granted in him--were the more striking. Both statement and remark revealed her character in a light more lurid than even he had been prepared for. He was really unable to do more than stare at her. Claire evidently misinterpreted the stare yet more outrageously. She had the grace to flush faintly, though her eyes were still half ironic, half defiant.

"I do so assure you."

"I did not need the assurance." Damier found his voice, but it was hoarse.

Claire, in a little pause, looked her consciousness of having struck a very false note.

"And now no assurance would convince you that I am not very low-minded and vulgar. Well, I am, I suppose. *Que voulez-vous?* Only don't be too much shocked by my frankness; don't be prudish. A man may be propriety itself, but he may not be prudish. Remember that I am twenty-seven, that I know my world (though how I have been able to get my knowledge with such a dexterously shuffling and shielding Mamma, I don't know), and that I think it merely silly to pretend that I don't know it before a man with whom I am as intimate as I am with you. Of course, on the face of it, to accept money from a married man who is in love with one does suggest a situation usually described as immoral."

Damier was feeling choked, feeling, too, that he almost hated Claire, as she walked beside him, slowly and lightly, opulently lovely, the flush of anger--it was more anger than shame--still on her cheek.

"I must tell you," he said, in a voice steeled to a terrible courtesy, "that it is you alone who inform me of your indebtedness to Monsieur Daunay's kindness. He, I now see, did not tell me everything."

"What did he tell you, then?" she asked, stopping short in the path and fixing her eyes upon him, in her voice a rough, almost a plebeian, note.

"That he adored you, and that he could be trusted."

"Well, he can be!" She broke into a hard laugh. "*Le cher bon Daunay!* I thought that of course he would paint a piteous picture of his woes. And now you are furious with me because I supposed that, as a man of the world, you might unfairly, yet naturally, imagine more than he told you."

Damier made no reply.

"You are furious, are you not?"

"I am disgusted, but not for that reason only."

"You think I am in love with him!" She stopped again in the narrow path. "I swear to you that I am not!" He would have interrupted her, but her volubility swept past his attempt. "If he had been free I would have married him--I own it; at one time, at least, I would have married him. I am French in my freedom from sentimental complications on that subject. I could have found no other man in this country willing to marry a dotless girl. I should have preferred, of course, a *mariage d'amour*; but, given my circumstances, could I have found anything more desirable than a kind, generous, and adoring friend like Monsieur Daunay?"

"I should say certainly not,"--Damier waited with a cold patience until she had finished,--"but again you have misinterpreted me; I am disgusted not because you love Monsieur Daunay, but because you do not love him."

At this, after a stare, Claire gave a loud laugh.

"Ah!--*c'est trop fort!* You can't make me believe that you want me to love him."

"I don't want you to love him; but I say that the circumstances would be more to your credit if you did."

Her face now showed a mingled relief and perplexity.

"Ah, it is the money, then--that I should accept it!"

"Can I make no appeal to you for your mother's sake--for the sake of your own dignity?"

"I can take care of my own dignity, Mr. Damier." The relief was showing in her quieter voice, her fading flush. "I see how angry you are--and only because I have not pretended with you. Let me explain. I never pretend with you: I

can only explain. I must begin at the beginning to do it; and the beginning and the end is our poverty. Mamma had a pittance left to her, a year or so after my father's death, by some relations, and that, since then, has been our only *pied-a-terre*. She would never accept the allowance, quite a generous one, too, that her family wished to make her. I don't want to blame her; I know how you feel about her; I appreciate it. But it was, I must say it, very selfish of her; she should have thought more of me--the luckless result of her mesalliance--and less of her own pride. I really hardly know how she brought me up: though, I own, she gave me a good education; I was always at school during my father's life--she avoided *that* soil for me, you may be sure! I give her credit for all that; she must have worked hard to do it. But she owed me all she could get for me, and, I must say, she did not pay the debt." Claire had been looking before her as she talked, but now she looked at Damier, and something implacable, coldly enduring, in his eye warned her that her present line of exculpation was not serving her. "Don't imagine, now, that I am complaining--ungrateful," she said a little petulantly. "I know--as well as you do--what a good mother she has been to me. I only want to show you that she is not altogether blameless--that she is responsible, in more ways than one, for me--for what I am. Let it pass, though. When I came home, a young girl, full of life and eager for enjoyment, what did I find? Poverty, labor, obscurity. It was an ugly, a meager existence she had prepared for me, and, absolutely, with a certain pride in it! She expected me to enjoy work, shabby clothes, grave pursuits, as much as she did, or, at all events, not to mind them. Plain living, high thinking--that was her idea of happiness for me!" Insensibly the ironic note had grown again in her voice. "I remember, too, at first, her taking me to see poor people in horrid places--expecting me to talk to them, sing to them; I soon put a stop to that. At her age, with a ruined life, it is natural that one should wish to devote one's self to *bonnes-oeuvres*; but for me, *ah, par exemple!*" Claire gave a coarse laugh. "I had not quite come to that! She gave me the best she had--all she had, you will say; I own it: but not all she might have had. And then she need not have expected me to enjoy--should not have been aggrieved, wounded, because I only endured. Again,--I am not unjust,--it was not all high thinking; she had her schemes for my amusement--*d'une simplicité!* Really, for such a clever woman, Mamma can be dull! And the people we knew! We had a right--you know it--to *le vrai grand monde*. You know it, and you are trying, now, to help me to it. But Mamma did not try. With a little management she might have regained her place in it; but no--her pride again! She seemed to think that *she* was *le grand monde*, and that I ought to be satisfied with that! And now, with all this, you think it strange--*disgusting*--that when I saw that Daunay--*le pauvre!*--was in love with me I should ask him to continue to the daughter the aid that he had extended to the father! There again, for a clever woman, Mamma is dull--though her dullness has been to my advantage. She can make money, she can avoid spending it, but she has little conception of its value; she does the housekeeping, and, after that, she leaves the management of our resources to me. She is funnily gullible about the price of my clothes; the lessons I give would hardly keep me in shoes and stockings--as I understand shoes and stockings!" Claire laughed. "This dress that I have on--Mamma imagines it is made by a little dressmaker whom I am clever enough to guide with my taste. I take out the name on the waist-band and she is none the wiser. This dress is a Doucet." There was now quite a blithe complacency in Claire's voice. "And I have always considered myself amply excusable," she went on, "in accepting the small pleasures that life offered me. Of course it has really not been much that I have been able to accept--though he would willingly--and he is not rich--give more. Jewels, for instance, I have never dared attempt--nor even many dresses; that would have been incautious. For Mamma, of course, must never know; she would be inexpressibly shocked. I can see her face!"

So could Damier. He was conscious of almost a wish to be brutal to Claire, physically brutal--to strike her to the dust where she dragged the image of his well beloved; but, after a moment, he said in a voice quiet enough: "You must tell her now; you must tell her everything."

Claire stopped short in the path. "Tell her!"

"You must, indeed." The full rigor of his eyes met the astonishment of hers.

"Never!" said Claire, and in French, as if for a more personal and intimate emphasis, she repeated: "*Jamais!*"

"I will, then; it is an outrage not to tell her."

Their eyes measured each other's resolution.

"If you do," said Claire, "shall I tell you with what I retaliate? I will run away with Monsieur Daunay. Yes; I speak seriously. I would prefer not to be pushed to that extremity, but I sometimes think that I am getting a little tired of respectability *au quatrieme*. It isn't good enough, as you English say; I get no interest on my investment. To tell her! Now, of all times, when I so need the money, when the small gaieties and pleasures you have brought into my life depend on my having it, making an appearance! She would not let me take it. She would be glacial--and firm. Oh, I have had scenes with her! I could not stand any more."

For once Claire was fully vehement, her cheeks flaming, her eyes at once threatening and appealing. He could hardly believe her serious, and yet she silenced him--indeed, she terrified him. Claire read the terror in his wide eyes and whitening lips. Her look suddenly grew soft, humorous. She slipped her hand inside his arm.

Involuntarily he started from her, then, repenting, for even while he so loathed her he had never found her so piteous, "I beg your pardon--but you horrify me too much."

"Come, come," she said, and, unresentfully, though with some determination, she secured his arm, "don't take me

au pied de la lettre. I am not really in earnest; you know that; I had to use a threat--had to frighten you. Come." That she had been able so thoroughly to frighten him seemed to have restored in her her old air of complacent mastery. "You are wide-minded, clever, kind. Don't misjudge me. Don't push me to the wall. Don't apply impossible standards to me. See me as I am. By nature, by temperament, I am simply a bohemian. It isn't my fault if my mother happens to be a saint, and a horribly well-bred saint; it really isn't my fault if she has handed on to me neither of those qualities. I am perfectly frank with you. From the first I felt that I could be frank with you; I felt that you understood me; don't tell me now that I was mistaken."

"I do understand you," said Damier, "but you horrify me none the less."

"I horrify you because I am a creature thwarted, distorted; nothing is more ugly or repulsive--but if I had had a chance!"

"What would a chance have done for you? You have had every chance to be noble and loving and happy--yes, happy."

"But not in my own way!--not in my own way!" she cried, and now she clasped both hands on his arm and leaned against his shoulder as she looked into his face. "I needed power and wealth--all the real foundations of happiness and nobility. Then--ah, then I should have blossomed. Or else, failing them, I needed liberty and joy--the life of a bohemian. I have had neither the one nor the other, and if I seem almost wicked to you it is because of that; for, to me, wickedness means going against one's nature. I have always been forced to go against mine; I have never had a chance."

Damier gave a mirthless laugh. "On the contrary, to me wickedness means going with one's nature."

"Ah, there we differ; and yet we understand."

Again he had that feeling of perplexity and irritation. Her eyes, the clasp of her hands upon his arm, irked and troubled him, and without, now, any sense of glamour in the trouble and irritation. She seemed to make too great a claim upon his understanding, and to rely too much upon some conviction of her own charm that could dare any frankness just because it was so sure of triumph. He felt that at the moment he did not understand her; he felt, too, that he did not want to--that he was tired of understanding her.

"You are an unhappy creature, Claire," he said. They were nearing the Porte Dauphine, and while he spoke with a full yet distant gravity, Damier looked about for a fiacre. "An unhappy creature with an unawakened soul."

"Will you try to wake it, the poor thing?" asked Claire. She still held his arm, though he had tried to disengage it, and though she spoke softly, there was a vague hardness in her eyes, as though she felt the new hardness in him, though as yet not quite interpreting its finality.

"I shouldn't know how to: I am helpless before it. It should be made to suffer," he said. A cab had answered his summons, and he handed her into it. "No, I cannot go home with you," he said. "Are you going home?"

"I am going to lunch with old Mademoiselle Daunay, and see Monsieur Daunay there. I had no chance to speak to him last night." Claire, sitting straightly in the open cab, had an expression of perplexity and of growing resentment on her face; but as he merely bowed and was about to turn away, she started forward and put her hand on his shoulder.

"Are you going to make it suffer?" she asked. He looked into her eyes. He did not understand her, but he saw in them a demand at once alluring and threatening. His one instinct was to deny strongly whatever she demanded, though he did not know what that was.

"I have no mission toward your soul, Claire," he said. For another moment the eyes that threatened and allured dwelt on his; then, calling out the address to the cabman, she was driven away.

XIV



N Damier's return to his hotel early in the afternoon, he found a note from Madame Vicaud awaiting him. "Monsieur Daunay has just been here," it said, "and destiny has strangely brought this matter to a crisis. His wife is dead, and he has asked me for Claire's hand, feeling that his false position toward me demanded an immediate reparation. He hopes and believes that she loves him; but this, as both you and I must know, is impossible. I am saddened and confused by the whole situation. I do not blame them, but to me it is all displeasing, even shocking--this haste to profit by the wife's opportune death most of all. Will you come and see me? Claire is lunching at his cousin's, and he will find her there. I told him to speak to her himself, as I felt that to act the maternal part of intermediary between them would now be mere formalism and affectation; so I am alone. You will want to speak to me, I know."

Damier, as he drove to the Rue B---, speculated on the rather mystifying significance of the last sentence. He always wanted to speak to her: that she must know; but why now in particular? Since his interview with Claire that morning he had felt almost too shaken by pity for the mother to trust himself with her. He would not be able to help her with counsel and consolation; he would not be able to think of Claire; and at this turning-point in Claire's life it was for that that the mother needed him.

He found her standing in the salon, evidently pausing to meet him, in a restless pacing to and fro. Her eyes dwelt on him gently and very gravely while she took his hand.

"Who could have expected this swift denouement? But it is best," she said, "and I pitied him very deeply."

"Pitied him--for the past, you mean?" Damier questioned.

"Oh, for the future more!"

Damier wondered over her eyes, over the something tremulous in her smile.

"I saw Claire this morning," he said. "We talked over the matter; she wished to see me."

Madame Vicaud showed no surprise at this piece of information. "Ah, yes; I understand," she said.

"She certainly told me that she did not love him," Damier went on, "and yet--" He paused, not quite knowing how to put to her his hope that Claire now would reconsider the situation, his hope that she would marry Monsieur Daunay.

It would be the solution of all difficulties, the best solution possible, and the situation could then be defined anew in terms that he more and more deeply longed for. He hardly dared, even yet, before her unconsciousness, define it, and turning away from her, he walked down the room, urging himself to a courage great enough to enable him now to speak to her what was in his heart. Madame Vicaud was watching him thoughtfully when he faced her again at the end of the room, and with still that look of controlled emotion.

"I, also, have something to tell you," he said.

"Yes," she assented quietly, yet with the look evidently braced, steeled, in preparation for what she was to hear.

"Can you guess?" he asked.

She was standing now, strangely, in the attitude of the little photograph--leaning on the back of a high chair; and her eyes recalled yet more strangely the intentness of the picture's eyes as she said: "You have come to tell me that you love my daughter?"

He was so deeply astonished, so completely thrown back upon himself, that for a long moment he could only gaze helplessly into the eyes' insolubility.

"No," he said at last; "I did not come to tell you that."

"But you do love her?" Madame Vicaud inquired, with something of gentle urgency in her voice, as though she helped his shyness. "Be frank with me, my friend; I have guessed so much more, seen so much more, than you told me or showed me. Even with all that saddens you, that pains you, you do love her--enough to overlook the pain and sadness?"

"No," said Damier, still facing her from his distance, "I do not love her. I have never needed to overlook anything."

Plainly it was her turn to be astonished, thrown back upon herself.

"But, from the beginning, has that not been your meaning?"

"You, only, have been my meaning."

He saw that her thought, in its disarray, could not pause upon his interpretation of these words. She had straightened herself, both hands on the chair-back, and her wide gaze, her parted lips, and the vivid wonder and surmise in her face made her look curiously young.

"You have, from the first, been so much with her--seemed to take so much interest in her--seemed so to understand her; she was so open--so intimate--"

"She is your daughter."

"But that, I thought, added to the certainty: you must, I thought, love my daughter--"

He was forced to beat a retreat for a moment of disentanglement; and, suddenly, disentanglement seemed to demand a cutting sincerity.

"I don't, in the very least, love Claire; I have never, in the very least, loved her; I have only been sorry for her."

"Sorry for her? Because of her dull, bleak life? Ah, have I not been sorry, too?"

"But I not for that," said Damier, "not for that; but because she made me so sorry for you; because"--and he looked at her--"because you do not love her."

He was still at a distance from her, and across it her look met his in a long silence.

Then a strange, a tragic thing happened to her. He had before seen her flush faintly; but it was now a deep, an agonizing blush that slowly rose and darkened in her face. The revelation of look and blush was long before she leaned her elbows on the chair-back and covered her face with her hands.

"Forgive me!" Damier murmured. He felt as if he had stabbed her. He came to her, and, half kneeling on the chair before her, he longed, but did not dare, to put his arms around her and sweep away this complication, and all the others--ah, the others?--the years and years of them that rolled between them!--in a full and final confession. "Forgive me for seeing--it is not your fault; it is my clear-sightedness--"

She made no reply.

"You try to understand her, but she is alien to you. She tears at every fiber of you. There is nothing in her that does not hurt you," Damier said, hastening to speak all the truth, since the moment inevitably had come for it.

Madame Vicaud lifted her head.

"I do understand her," she said. She did not look at him. Straightening her shoulders, drawing a long breath, she walked away from him to the window; there, her back to him, she added, the truth seemingly forced from her as it had been from him, "And I hate her."

Damier remained leaning against the chair. The situation, in its strangeness, dazed him. But looking at her figure, dark against the light, he was able to say: "I even guessed that--almost."

"Yet you do not hate her," she said, after a pause of some moments, speaking without moving or turning her head.

Damier paused too. "I have not your reasons," he said at last.

"Ah, my reasons! Yes." She turned to him now, as though she saw in him an accusing world, and faced it in an attitude of desperate self-justification.

"They began with her father," said Damier.

"I hated him," she said. Her eyes looked through him, fixed on the abyss of the past. "I hated him. He was abhorrent to me. I lived with him for fifteen years--fifteen long, long years. I bore his brutality, his wickedness--I am not the woman to use the word prudishly--I can make allowances--wide ones--for temperament, environment, all the mitigating causes: but my husband's wickedness was unimaginably vile; to see it stained one's thoughts." The memory of it, as she spoke, had chilled her to a drawn and frozen pallor; it was as though the blighting breath of the past went across her face, aging it, emptying it of life.

"I bore the ruin he brought; that was nothing--a spur to love, had love been possible. I bore his serene, inflexible selfishness. The only thing I would not bear"--and she still looked full at Damier, but with the same unseeing largeness of gaze--"was his love. *His* love!" She turned and walked across the room. Damier felt his own flesh shudder as he looked behind the curtain her words lifted, felt his own heart freeze in the aching sympathy of its comprehension. He could not speak to her. It seemed to him that she stood at a great distance from him and would not hear him. Her voice, when she spoke again, had less of its haunting terror, but it still thrilled with a deep and tragic note: "All this, as thousands of women have done, because it was my duty--to help him--to uphold him--to stand by him unflinchingly, and--because he was *her* father. You said that my reasons for hating her began with him. Ah, but he was my reason for loving her so desperately--with such a longing to atone to her for him. I gave her all the love he had crushed out of me. You see his picture there; I have schooled myself, so that she may not feel the smirch of him through my horror, to bear the sight of him, to say to myself every day, 'That is the face I loved.' Oh, what madness!--what madness!" She pressed her hands hard upon her eyes. "Some day, perhaps,--since I tell you everything,--I will tell you that story, too--my love-story. The memory of it is like a block of lead upon my heart." Her hands fell, but the memory made her silent, and for a long moment she stood looking down. "But all was hidden from her: the dread,--that soon passed--I was the stronger, he came to feel it, dread fell from me,--the hate that followed it, and the final, the terrible pity,--for I came to pity him when he hung about my life, helpless, like a torn and dirty rag,--all that was hidden from her. I kept her lifted out of the mud he dragged us down to; she never saw its depths. While he lived, and while he was dying,--and horrible to see and hear,--she was at a school. Those days!" She paused and turned away, and then went on: "It was in the winter. Lessons fell away; there was the school, the doctor, all the expenses of an illness to be met. I went into the streets of nights, a man carrying my harp, and sang for money; I had a voice till then, and I braved more than the snow and the night to do it: I was still beautiful. This that you may see how I loved her, how I struggled for her, how like any mother, though now I seem so hard--so hideously unnatural. Ah, I fought--I cannot tell you, you cannot guess, how I fought for her. And then, he died, and then there was for me peace and the blossoming of delicious hope. She and I together, saved from the wreck. It seemed to me that I had battled through waves, past rocks and whirlpools, holding her to my breast, and had reached the shore at last--she alive for me, and I for her. And then--ah, then! The shipwreck, the years of struggle, were crude tragedy to my gradual realizing of the subtle disaster that was to poison my life forever. Year by year I saw it coming--I saw him creeping into her. I saw the grave purpose settle round her lips--the steady greed for self. I saw his smile in her eyes; his eyes were beautiful like hers: when I first looked at them, I thought them full of splendid dreams, noble strength. She was not cruel, or brutal, or vicious, as he had been. She submitted placidly; she submitted, and I hoped for happiness. I could not make her happy or unhappy. I meant nothing to her except the thing that fed and clothed her. She took what I could give, and waited for what I could not give. She lied only when the truth would not serve her purpose better; so, often, she was frank with me. Her grave laugh maddened me, and her indifferent adapting of herself to me--for expediency, not for love. If only she had become a gentle and beautiful animal, to guard from its own instincts! but she is an animal of such hideous intelligence; she knows when I try to guard her, and evades me. Like him, she is corrupt to the core of her; not--do not misunderstand me--that she would do wrong in a conventional sense--and that it is conventional wrong-doing that I dread she has always pretended to read into my horror of evil, making a plaster saint of me so that she may more easily evade the deeply understanding woman of flesh and blood. Hers is the worse corruption, that calculates chances, chooses and manages. It is there in her, I know,

though, in its worst forms, latent still--I think."

Damier, white already, felt himself blanch before the rapid glance, like a sword-stroke across his face, that she cast upon him. She guessed at all his knowledge.

Again she turned away and walked up and down the room.

"Hideous, hideous that I should speak so to you, and to you I hoped, yet dreaded--You will wonder how I could have hoped it; how, knowing this, I should not have warned you. But at first I did not think it possible, though I knew her charm; at first I did not understand you, and, not understanding, I guarded you. And then I saw your generous, your pitiful heart, and I saw that it understood Claire, that perhaps you understood her better than I did. With you she was her best self; she trusted you, it seemed, so utterly. I hoped that yours was the clearer vision, that I was warped, no longer capable of true seeing. Yet, when the friendship that I rejoiced in grew, as I thought, into love, there was a terrible struggle in me. My strong attachment to you--you who had opened the prison gates that shut me into my misery, who brought me out of a loneliness so long, so bitter--ah! my friend, do not think that I have not seen and felt it all; but I could not speak to you as I might have spoken had it not been for that struggle in me between the justice owed to you--yet that you did not seem to need--and the duty to her--not to withhold, for your sake, a possibility that might redeem her. My mind was fixed in that struggle; of our friendship, yours and mine, I could not think clearly. If you had been ignorant, if she had hidden herself from you, I should have sacrificed her unflinchingly to you; I should have interposed and shown her to you. But she showed herself to you. I knew, from my knowledge of you, that she would not attract you as she attracts most men, not nobly. I saw from her looks with you, her words, that she would make no efforts so to attract you. I must say all to you, since you must understand all. Claire does not love you, but you attract what is best in her. She relies, I have guessed it, upon the very pathos of her moral ugliness to enchant you, to arouse in you the chivalrous, redemptive qualities she sees in you. And I grew to hope that you saw something that I could not see. I even began to feel a blind, groping tenderness for her through your fancied tenderness; and as I allowed myself to hope that you loved her, I allowed myself to have faith in the redeeming power of your love."

She stood before him now, looking at him with saddest eyes; and Damier, answering them, shook his head.

"Alas, no. It would have been my story over again, the positions reversed, and you without my illusions, had you loved her, married her; and yet, it was because you had no illusions that I hoped."

But Damier could not think of dead hopes.

"What you have suffered!" he said.

"Yes," Madame Vicaud answered, "I have suffered; but do not, in your kindness, your tenderness, exaggerate. I have suffered, but all has not been black. There have been flowers on the uphill road. I don't believe in a woe that is blind to them, or to the sky overhead."

But she still stood looking at dead hopes, not thinking of him.

"Clara," said Damier.

She was a woman of deep understanding, yet even now,--and hardly was it to be wondered at, so lifted through its very intensity was his love for her above love's ordinary manifestations,--even now her name so gravely spoken by him had no further meaning for her than the one openly, proudly, joyously accepted, the meaning of the strange tie that had united them; but, while she accepted it, his look startled her. It showed nothing new, but seemed to interpret newly something she had not recognized before. Smiling faintly, she said:

"You have a right."

"Not the right I would have." He felt no excitement, only the enraptured solemnity that a soul might feel in some quiet dawn of heaven on finding another soul parted from years ago on earth--long sought for, long loved.

She said nothing, her dark eyes fixing him with a wonder that was already a recognition.

"I love you," said Damier. He had not moved toward her, nor had she moved away. A little distance separated them, and they stood silently looking at each other.

"You mean--" she said at last.

"I mean in every way in which it is possible for a man to love the woman he worships."

The whirl of her mind mirrored itself in the stricken stupefaction of her wan, beautiful features. She caught at one flashing thought. "And I--her mother! You might have been my son!"

"No; I might not," Damier affirmed.

"By age; I am old enough."

"I know your age; you are forty-seven," said Damier, able to smile at her, "and I am thirty. If you were seventy-seven, the only difference would be that I could have fewer years to spend with you; I should wish to spend them just the same. As it is, your age does not make us ludicrous before the world, if we were to consider that."

At this she turned from him as if in impatience at this quibbling, and her own endurance of it, at such a moment.

"My friend! That this should have happened to you!"

"Can it never happen to you?" he asked.

"I would never allow it to happen to me."

"It would not be to look up at the sky--it would not even be to stoop to a flower?"

"I would not allow myself to look, or to stoop, knowing that after I had looked and gathered, the flower would wither, the sky be black."

He saw, as she gazed steadily round at him, that the gaze was through tears. Claspings his hands with a supplication that was, indeed, more the worshiper's than the lover's, Eustace said:

"But would you--would you stoop?"

"I cannot answer that; I cannot think the answer. Your friendship has led me away from the rocky wastes into the sweetest, the serenest meadows." Though she spoke with complete self-mastery, the tears ran down as she said these words, and she turned her face away. "I should be culpable indeed if I allowed you to lead me aside into a fool's paradise, with a precipice waiting for you in the middle of it. I shall be an old woman while you are still a young man."

"Beloved woman, can you not believe that, young or old, you are the same to me? I have not fallen in love with you--I have found you. When I saw your face in the old picture I knew that it was mine."

"The face of a girl. I was nineteen then."

"Do not juggle with the truth. Your face now is dearer to me than the girl's face. Your heart, I believe, is nearer mine than you know. That struggle in you when you imagined that I loved Claire, was it not, in part, the struggle of a sacrifice? Did you not submit because you thought that the side of self-sacrifice must be the right side?"

Still her face was turned from him, and after a silence she said, "Perhaps."

"And if this were our last moment--if there were no question of age or of going on--then--then would you tell me that you have felt something of my feeling--the finding--the recognition--the rapture--own to it with joy?"

She turned to him now and looked at him, at his eager, solemn face, the supplication and worship of his clasped hands, looked for a long time, without speaking. But her face, though she was so white and so grave, seemed, as she looked, to reflect, with a growing radiance, the youth in his.

"I have felt it," she said at last, "but I have hardly known that I felt it."

"You know now?"

"Yes, I know now."

"You could own to it--with joy?"

"If this were our last moment.--Ah, my friend!" He had taken her into his arms.

The long years drifted away like illusions before an awakening. Her girl-hood--but weighted with such dreams of sorrow and loneliness!--seemed with her again. She was helpless, though her heart reproached him and herself, yet could not wholly reproach--helpless in a happiness poignant and exquisite. They kissed each other gently, and, his arms around her, they looked earnestly at each other. Speechlessly they looked the finding, the recognition, the rapture.

The meeting in heaven had come; but there was still the earth to be counted with.

XV



As they heard the tinkle of the entrance-bell, Claire's voice, her step outside, Madame Vicaud moved away from Damier. She was seated in a chair near the table, and the young man stood beside her, when Claire entered.

Claire paused in the doorway and looked sullenly, yet hardly suspiciously, at them. She had never worn a mask for Damier, yet he saw in her flushed and somber face something new to him, saw that she lacked some quality--was it confidence, indifference, placidity?--that he had always found in her. He guessed in a moment that her interview with Monsieur Daunay had not been a propitious one.

"I did not expect to see you so soon again, and under such suddenly changed circumstances," she said to him. "What are you talking about? Me?" She took off her hat,--the day was sultry,--pushed up her thick hair, and dropped her length of ruffled, clinging white into a chair. "So; I have seen Monsieur Daunay. He lost no time, it seems. He asked my hand of you first, I hear, Mamma, in proper form--*tres convenablement*."

"Yes," Madame Vicaud assented with composure.

"It seems that you discouraged him."

"I could not encourage him from what you had told me, but from what he told me it seems that you did not discourage him," the mother answered.

"I have never been in a position to discourage any useful possibility," said Claire.

Madame Vicaud, in silence, and with something of a lion-tamer's calm intentness of eye, looked at her daughter;

and Claire, after meeting the look with one frankly hostile, turned her eyes on Damier.

"And it seems that you, last night, did not discourage Monsieur Daunay's hopes; he spoke of you with gratitude. What have you to say to it all now?"

"I have nothing to say to it; it has always been your affair--yours and his."

"You made it yours, it seems to me!"

"Unwillingly."

"Oh--unwillingly!" Claire laughed her ugliest laugh. "I don't understand you, Mr. Damier--I began not to understand you this morning"; and, as he made no reply:

"Your present silence doesn't accord with your past interference."

"My silence? What do you expect me to say?" Damier asked, with real wonder, forgetting the mother's intimations.

"Can you deny that--apart from your feelings of angered propriety--you were pitifully jealous last night and this morning? I had to assure you again and again that I did not love him--the truth, as it happens."

This speech now opened such vistas of interpretation to the past--of interrogation to the future--that Damier could only, speechlessly, look his wonder at her.

"Were you not jealous?" she demanded.

"Not in the faintest degree."

Her flush deepened at this, an angry, not an embarrassed, flush.

"And what, then, was your motive for prying, meddling, cross-questioning as you did? You had a motive?"

"I have always had an interest in your welfare, Claire, but your mother was my motive for meddling and cross-questioning, as you put it."

"Oh--my mother!" Claire tossed her a look where she sat, her arms folded, near the table. "You were afraid for my honor since hers was involved in it? Was that it?"

"Perhaps that was it--and for the same reason I beg you to spare your mother now."

Claire leaned back in her chair and fixed upon him a heavy stare above her heavy flush. "Come," she said, "I have never had pretenses with you--I have always been frank. Do you intend to marry me? There it is clearly; I have no false delicacy, and, bon Dieu! you have given me every right to ask the question."

Madame Vicaud, soundless at the table, now leaned her elbows upon it and covered her face with her hands. "Come," Claire repeated, casting another look upon her; "for Mamma's sake, you owe me an answer. Spare her the shame--she feels it bitterly, you observe--of seeing my outrageous uncertainty prolonged. Haven't you spent all your time with me? Haven't you taken upon yourself a position of authority toward me--made my affairs your own? Aren't you going to--how would Mamma put it?--redeem me--lift me? Or are you going to let my soul suffer a little longer?"

"You could hardly speak so, Claire, if you spoke sincerely," said Damier; "you may once have misinterpreted my friendship for you, but you no longer misinterpret it. I have never intended to marry you. It is you, remember, who force me into this ugly attitude. I could not face you in it, were I not sure that your feeling for me has always been as free from anything amorous as mine for you."

"I don't speak of my feeling for you!" Claire cried in a voice suddenly loud, leaning forward with her elbows on the arms of her chair, "but of yours for me! It is not there now--I see it plainly, and I see plainly why! She--*she*--has been talking to you against me!--telling you about some childish follies in my life!--making you believe that I would not be a fit wife for you! Ah, yes!--I know her!" Claire pointed a shaking finger at her mother. "She would think it her duty to protect you against me--I know her!"

"Be still," said Damier in his voice of steel.

Claire, for a moment, sank back, panting, defiant, but silent before it.

"You are conscious of your own falsehood, but you can scarcely be conscious of how base and vile you are. Your mother, when I came to-day, was hoping that I had come to ask her for your hand; she believed that I loved you, and hoped it."

Claire, in her sullen recoil, still remained sunken and panting in her chair.

"Well, then! And what have you got to say to us both, then, if you gave us both cause for such a supposition? What have you meant by it all?"

"What I meant from the beginning I can best define by telling you that to-day I asked your mother to marry me."

Claire sat speechless and motionless. The words seemed to have arrested thought, and to have nailed her to her chair. Damier looked at Madame Vicaud. Her hands had dropped from her face, and she met his eyes.

"The truth was allowed me?" he said.

"It is always allowed," she answered.

Her face was so stricken, so ghastly, that Damier, almost forgetting in his great solicitude the hateful presence in

the room, leaned over her, taking her hand.

"Bear it. It is better to have it all over. And, in a sense, it is my own fault. I should have spoken to you sooner--defined what I meant from the first."

"So," Claire said suddenly. Her smoldering eyes, while they spoke, had gone from one to the other. "So; this is what it all meant! Indeed, I cannot blame myself for not having guessed it. You in love with my mother! Or, shall we not more truthfully say, she in love with you?--the explanation, as a rule, you know, of these odd amorous episodes. I begin to understand. I did not suspect a rival in my own mother. Clever Mamma!"

"Let this cease now," said Madame Vicaud, in a lifeless voice. "All has been said that it is necessary to say."

"Indeed, no!" cried Claire. She sprang to her feet, braving Damier's menacing look, and stood before them with folded arms, defiantly. "All has not been said! I am to marry the middle-aged, middle-class man of small fortune, and you are to marry the *prince charmant*! Ah, don't think that I am in love with you, *prince charmant*, though I might have loved you had not my mother had such a keen eye for her own interests, and kept mine so dexterously in the background. I might have loved you had you been allowed to fall in love with me. Oh, I know what you would say!" Her voice rose to a shout as she interrupted his effort to speak. "How base, how vile, and how vulgar--*n'est-ce pas*? A girl clamoring over the loss of a husband! Shocking! Well, I own to my vulgarity. I did want to marry you. You have money, position--all the things I never hid from you that I liked; and you interested me, and I liked you, and I could be myself with you. My mother has always been too dainty to secure a husband for me--arrange my future: I have had to do all the ugly work myself; and I liked you because--just because I had to do no ugly work with you. And I clamor now--not because I have lost you--no, it's not that; but because she--*she* has made her goodness serve her so!--has made it pay where my frankness failed. She is good, if you will; but I tell you that I prefer my vulgarity--my baseness--my vileness to her clever virtue; or is it an unconquerable passion with you, Mamma?--is it to be a *mariage d'amour* rather than a *mariage de convenance*?"

While Claire spoke, her mother, as if mesmerized by her fury, sat looking at her with dilated eyes and a fixed face--a face too fixed to show anguish. Rather it was as if, with an intense, spellbound interest, she hung upon her daughter's words, hardly feeling, hardly flinching before her insults, hardly conscious of each whip-like lash that struck her face to a more death-like whiteness. Now, drawing a breath that was almost a gasp, she leaned forward over the table, stretching her arms upon it and clasping her hands. "Claire, Claire!" she said, with a hurried, staccato utterance, "I see it all with your eyes--I understand. You have had something really dear taken from you--not love, perhaps, but a true friendship; that is so, isn't it? He seems to have turned against you,--isn't it so?--and through me. There is in you an anger that seems righteous to you. How cruel to have our best turned against us! I see all that. Ah, no, no! Let me speak to her!" For, Claire keeping the hardened insolence of her stare upon her, Damier, full of a passionate, protecting resentment, put his arm around her shoulders, took her hand. She threw off the hand, the arm, almost cruelly. "Let me speak to my child! Don't come between us now--now when we may come together, she and I. Yes, Claire, he loves me,--you see it,--too much, perhaps, to be just to you, though he has been so just--more just than I have been, perhaps; he has been so truly your friend. But now I am just. I am your mother. I can understand. I love him, Claire, yes, I love him; but I understand you. I will never do anything to part us further--understand me! I will never marry him against your will. Oh, Claire, try to understand me--try to trust me--try to love me!" She rose to her feet, her face ardent with the upsurging of all her longing motherhood, its sudden flaming into desperate hope through the deep driftings of ashen hopelessness; and as if swayed forward by this flame of hope, this longing of love, this ardor, she leaned toward her child, stretched out her arms toward her face of heavy impassivity. At the gesture, at her mother's last words, Claire's impassivity flickered into a half-ironic, half-pitying smile. But she did not advance to the outstretched arms. Merely looking at her with this searing pity, she said:

"You would marry him to me if you could, wouldn't you?--you would, as usual, sacrifice yourself to me; as usual, your radiance would shine against my dark. Poor, magnanimous Mamma! No, no, no!" She turned and walked up and down the room. "No, no! I am tired of all this--tired of you; and you are tired of me. You will marry Mr. Damier. Why not, after all? Don't let scruples of conscience interfere, especially none on my account. It would not separate us: we are separated; we have always been separated, and that we are gives me no pain. But don't expect me either to live with you when you are married, or to marry my antique lover and settle down to the respectable, tepid joys he offers me. No, and no again. I will not marry him. I leave the respectability to you two excellent people." The glance she shot at them now as they stood together was pure irony. Her mother's pale and beautiful face still kept its look of frozen appeal, as though, while she made the appeal, she had been shot through the heart. Its beauty seemed to sting Claire where the appeal did not touch, and, too, Damier's look, bent on her with a quiet that defied her and all she signified, stung her, perhaps, more deeply.

"My poor chances can't compete with yours, Mamma," she muttered. "Let me tell you that despair becomes you." She took up her hat.

"Where are you going, Claire?" Madame Vicaud asked in her dead voice.


"Don't be alarmed. Not to the Seine. I am going to a tea with Mrs. Wallingham. I shall be back to dinner. You will

admit me?"

"I shall always admit you."

"Good." Claire was putting in her hat-pins before the mirror. "That is reassuring. Console her, Mr. Damier. Try to atone to her for me--bad as I am, I am sure that you can do so. Ah, I don't harmonize with a love-scene!--it was one I interrupted, I suppose. Let me take my baseness--my vileness--from before you." Her hand on the door, she paused, fixing a last look upon them; then, with a short laugh, she said, "Accept my blessing," and was gone.

XVI

 ADAME VICAUD said nothing. She drew her hand from Damier's and sank again into the chair from which she had risen. Hope, ardor, and love, forever perhaps, were dead within her. She had hated her daughter, but under the hatred had been, always, the hidden flame, not, perhaps, of love, but of longing to love. She hated no longer, and the flame was quenched. Even in his nearness to her, Damier could not look with her at that slain longing. Walking away from her, he stood for a long time, gazing unseeingly over the garden, in silence. At last he turned and came to her. Her arm leaned on the table and her head upon her hand. With unutterable weariness she looked up at him.

"And now," she said, "you must go, my friend."

"Go?" Damier repeated.

Years of resolute endurance looked from her eyes; the weariness was not a wavering. Her face seemed sinking back into the abyss from which he had rescued it.

"Yes, you must go."

"And leave you with her!"

"And leave me with her," she assented monotonously.

"Never--never!"

She passed her hand over her brow, pressing her eyelids, as if in the effort to dispel her deep fatigue and find words with which to answer his harassing protest.

"Yet you must. I have the wonder, the treasure of your love for me. I will keep it always. I will never forget you. But it is impossible, even the friendship, now. We must not drag what is dear to us in the mire. I could not keep you as my friend under her eyes. I must live with her, and for her; that is the only life possible for me. I made it for myself. Whatever her cruelty, whatever her baseness, I have only to remember that I am responsible for her, that I am her only chance. And after this her presence in my life makes yours wrong. She knows now that you are not a friend only, and as a husband you could not remain. Such a *menage a trois* would be as detestable as it would be grotesque."

"She will marry!" cried Damier. "She must marry Monsieur Daunay."

"I do not think that she will marry him; but if she does marry, I could not separate my life from hers, though then I could see you again, but as friend, as friend only."

Damier burst out into a smothered invective:

"And you think of sacrificing the rest of your life to that creature--who has no love for you--whom you cannot love! What can you do for her? You can never change or soften her."

He felt that the vehemence of his despair and rebellion dashed itself against a rocky inflexibility, although she still bent her head upon her hand with the same deep weariness, not looking at him, still spoke on with the same monotonous patience:

"I cannot call the fulfilling of the most rudimentary maternal duty a sacrifice. You forget that my youth is past, and that with it the time for sacrifices is past, too. I have no claims on life. Life, at my age and in my position, can only be a dedication. I can, perhaps, never soften or change her; but I can still protect her; I can still lend her the dignity, such as it is, of my home and my companionship. And I can pity her, most piteous creature--whose mother has no love for her."

"Ah, you do not love me!" cried Damier, and all his youth was in the cry. "You sacrifice *me* with such composure! You give yourself to have your life sucked out of you by this vampire shape of the past. And it is me you rob! It is my life you immolate, as well as your own! What of my claim on life--my claim on you? You have no conception of what you are to me, or you could not speak of shutting me out from you; you could not think of sending me away! You could not speak so--think so--if you loved me!"

From her chair she now looked up at him, not with weariness, with a look curiously vivid and tender. "You speak like a boy," she said.

Damier flung himself on his knees beside her. "And you think that I can leave you when you can look at me like that--love me like that!"

"Because I do." She let him take her hands, and went on, almost smiling at him: "Because I love you like that, and because you love me like that, and because I am so much older than you--can't you feel it? how like a little boy--passionate, unruly in his grief--you seem to me! And because, in spite of my age and your boyishness, we do yet love each other so greatly that the very greatness of our love makes the question of our being together or apart really of not such significance."

"Of not such significance!" poor Damier cried. "I am to find you in heaven, then!"

"Probably." She did smile now, but he guessed that it was the brave smile she could summon over anguish. He guessed that her feeling of his boyishness was less apparent to her than her feeling of his power over her, his right to her. She might never yield to the power, never own to the right, but to guess that she felt them was assurance enough for the moment, and the pallor of the face that smiled at him was a reproach to him.

"No, no," he said; "I shall keep you there--and I shall keep you here, too. I will rescue you. I will find out the way. And I will leave you now and give you peace for a little while. You are terribly tired."

"Terribly," she assented. "It is kind and generous of you to go now."

"But my going is to be taken as no token of submission. I will return."

"To say good-by."

"So you say."

"So you will do." And she still smiled, all tenderness, all inflexibility.

"Never, never, never!" said Damier.

XVII



AMIER, for his own part, felt no need of peace. A passionate protestation, a passionate determination, filled him. At his hotel, as if in answer to vague plans and projects, the figure of Monsieur Daunay, rising from a chair, confronted him. From Monsieur Daunay's relief and alacrity he guessed that he had been waiting there for some time--ever since, he further guessed, his conversation with Claire.

"You have heard?" asked Monsieur Daunay, and a host of questions looked from his eyes.

"That you have proposed to Mademoiselle Vicaud, yes; and that she has answered you, I fear, not favorably; yes, I have heard."

"You have seen her?"

"I was with her mother, speaking with her of it, when Claire came."

"I have intruded thus upon you," said Monsieur Daunay, "in the faint hope that you might be able, after seeing her, to give me some encouragement, since from her I could elicit none. She was sullen, silent, reproached me for my haste. After all these years!" Monsieur Daunay groaned, and dropped again into his chair, folding his arms and bowing his head in a despairing acquiescence to fate's cruelty. "After all these years!" he repeated.

Damier saw down a long vista of them, sunny with the encouraging smiles of the charming Claire.

"You have assured me," Daunay presently said, "that you were not the cause of this change in Claire."

It was a rather perplexing question, but Damier was able truthfully to answer it with: "I can again assure you that it is only through her relation with her mother that Claire interests me."

"And so she has assured me, again and again, and that all her affection was for me. And yet, now that I can claim her--now that I come, trusting and hoping, she turns from me; she mutters that I am too old; not rich enough. Ah, *mon Dieu!*"

Claire, clearly, Damier also saw, had never endangered her certain hold upon Monsieur Daunay's usefulness by confessing to him her expectation of larger achievements. She would evade him, and hold him, as long as she had need of him.

Part of her anger to-day had, no doubt, been due to the fact that the sudden crisis had forced her into a decisive attitude toward him while yet uncertain that she could with safety give him up. Yet, indeed, she had been able to avoid absolute decisiveness--so Monsieur Daunay's next words proved:

"She told me that all her affection was still mine, but owned to higher ambitions; she had never, she said, hidden from me that she was ambitious, and life now was opening new possibilities to her. Could affection and ambition be combined, had I a large fortune to gild my middle age and my unimportance, she would at once marry me."

"She is utterly unworthy of you," said Damier.

At this a faint, ironic smile crossed the Frenchman's face. "Ah, *mon ami*," he said, "you need not tell me that. If I love Claire, do not imagine, as I told you last night, that I am blinded by my love. I love her *d'un amour fou*--and I recognize it. She possesses me; she can do what she will with me; I should forgive her anything. But I know that I am a

captive--and to no noble captor."

"Just heavens!" Damier broke out, indifferent, in his indignant pity, to his own interests, "shake off this obsession--and her with it! Leave her; go away; do not see her again. What misery if you were to marry her!"

"What will you? I adore her!" His helplessness seemed final. He presently went on: "But I came to-day to ask for your help. You occupy a peculiar position toward Madame Vicaud and her daughter; you have influence with them both. Use it in my favor, I beg of you. Intercede for me."

"Any influence I have shall, I promise you, be devoted to that purpose. I can hardly hope that your hopes will be realized; their realization could not be for your happiness. Pardon me, but have you never suspected that Claire is like her father--that she, too, is a miserable creature?"

For a long moment Daunay looked at him.

"She is like her father," he then said; "but have you never suspected, or, rather, do you not now see, that, because of that, my claim is all the stronger? What man not knowing it, marrying her in ignorance of it, would not repent? I should never repent. She is like him, if you will, but she is, irrevocably, the woman I love. More than that, she is the child I love; I have watched her grow up. From the beginning, she has been *ma petite Claire*; so she will be to the end--whatever that end may be."

Monsieur Daunay spoke with a profound feeling, a profound sincerity that the emotional tremor of his voice, the emotional tears in his eyes, only made the more characteristic and touching to Damier. He got up and grasped the Frenchman's hand in silence.

A knock at the door broke upon this compact of sympathy; a garcon brought a card to Damier and said that the lady waited for him in the salon below. The card was Lady Surfex's, and on it was written:

Must see you at once, on most important matter concerning Madame V.

"Wait for me here," Damier said to Monsieur Daunay. "This may concern you as well as me."

He found Lady Surfex in the drearily gaudy salon, her face ominous of ill tidings.

"My dear Eustace," she said,--they were alone, yet her voice was discreetly low,--"a horrid thing has happened--or is going to. I thought it best to come to you at once. Claire Vicaud runs away to-night with Lord Epsil."

And, as he stared at her in stricken silence:

"I found it out by chance. I was at Mrs. Wallingham's. They were there--Mademoiselle Vicaud and Lord Epsil. I watched them, indeed, with some uneasiness, as they sat, with ostentatious retirement, in a dim corner. I saw them go out together. Do you know, Eustace, my distrust of that girl and of that man--in justice to her, I must say it--was so great that I really was on the point of following them--asking her to let me drive her home; but I hesitated, people I knew came in, I had to speak to them, and so some time went by. Then, about half an hour after they were gone, Mrs. Wallingham came to me and whispered that a maid--a discreet English person who was dispensing tea in the dining-room--had overheard Lord Epsil saying to Mademoiselle Vicaud that they would take the night train to Dinard, and that his yacht was there. The woman came at once to her mistress. And now, Eustace, what can be done to save *her*?" They both knew to whom the pronoun referred; a conventional saving of Claire had significance only in reference to her mother.

Damier was steadying his thoughts.

"The night train." He looked at his watch. "There is time," he said.

"For what, Eustace?"

"There is only one chance. One can't appeal to her heart, or conscience--or even, it seems, to her ambition; but one might to her greed--offer her some firmer, surer competence. I had thought of it dimly before. I could catch that Dinard train--go with them--find some opportunity for seeing her alone before they reach Dinard--or before they reach the yacht."

"But, Eustace," her helpless wonder reproached his baseless optimism, "what *could* you do? You can't beard the man; she is of age--goes willingly. What a situation!"

"I could offer her half of my income for life, if she would consent to return with me, and to marry a man who is devoted to her--who, I think, would forgive anything."

"Eustace, it would leave you almost poor!"

"Not quite, since the half is large enough, I trust, to tempt her! The whole would not be too much to give to save *her* from this final blow."

"But can you--this man--will he?"

"He is up-stairs. I will see him, and start at once."

"And, Eustace--wait; can't we keep it from her--can't we think of some good lie?"

He had almost to smile at her intently thoughtful face.

"What possible lie can we think of? Claire will not come back to-night--she must know, sooner or later."

"But it is for to-night I want to spare her. Ah, I have it--no lie, either. I merely send a telegram, 'Claire may not return to-night: will explain to-morrow,' signed with my name; she will think Claire is passing the night with me; and then, you know, the girl may, at the last moment, decide not to go."

Damier had to yield to her eagerness. Up-stairs the words he had with Daunay were short, bitter, decisive. Averting his eyes from the unfortunate man's face, he put the case before him. He turned his back on him when he had spoken, went to the window, left him to an unobserved quaffing of the poisonous cup.

Monsieur Daunay's first words showed that he had quaffed it bravely and that his reason still stood firm.

"She must be mad," he said; "it is not like her."

"No, it is not like her. And I may tell you that I suspect revenge to be in part her motive. She had a terrible quarrel with her mother this afternoon."

Damier turned now and faced him.

"And now, Monsieur Daunay, are you willing to save her?"

"I am ready," the Frenchman said quietly; "with your help, I am ready to save her."

"I go at once, and with that assurance, then?"

"Yes; I am ready. Tell her that. Tell her, too, that if her mother will not receive her, she will find a home at my cousin's until our marriage can take place."

"Her mother will receive her," said Damier. "As you have forgiven, so she will forgive."

XVIII

THE long, hot, rushing hours had passed, for Damier, in a sort of stupor, the anaesthesia of one fixed idea. In the stuffy railway-carriage, his eyes on the dark square of the open window, where one saw vaguely the starlit depths of a midsummer night, he thought, with the odd detachment of a crisis, of the past day: the sunny morning walk with Claire--green leaves, purple shadows; the afternoon's supreme moment--a deep pulse of wonder in his heart, hardly to be seen in images; Lady Surfex among the palms and monstrous gilded pottery of the hotel salon; Monsieur Daunay's quiet, white face; the crowded Paris railway-station, and the glimpse he had caught in it of Claire and Lord Epsil. This most recent impression was also the most vivid, threw all the others into a blurred background where, with a new look of woe, only Madame Vicaud's face glimmered clearly.

The enforced pause at the height of his resolution made both the past and the future half illusory. The present, with not its usual flashing impermanence, had, for hours, been the same, had stopped, as it were, at an instant of vigilant alertness, and held him in it rigidly. Until the object of that vigilance, that alertness, were attained, he could not look forward or make projects. The chance for seeing Claire alone could not come, probably, until Dinard was reached. There, in the hurry of arrival, he might snatch a word with her. It would only be necessary to speak the word, to put the alternative before her. Entreaty would be useless; all the argument possible was the chink of gold in two hands; all the hope, that his chink might be the louder.

Shortly after ten o'clock the train drew up in the Rennes station. Damier had let no such opportunity escape him, and he again stepped from his compartment and stood looking toward the part of the train where he knew were Claire and her cavalier. As he looked he saw the tall figure of the Englishman stroll across the platform to the refreshment-buffet. The light fell full on his long, smooth, pink face,--a papier-mache pink,--on his long, high nose and whity-brown mustache. Damier darted forward. In an instant he was at the door, still ajar, of the compartment that Lord Epsil had just left. He saw, under the yellow glare of the lamp, a confusion of traveling-bags, rugs, bandboxes (Claire had evidently shopped), newspapers and magazines; a large box of bonbons lay on a seat, its contents half rifled, its papers strewing the floor; and, settled back in a corner, her shoulders huddled together in a graceful sleepiness, was Claire. A long silk traveling-cloak fell over her white dress; the winged white hat of the morning was pushed a little to one side as her head leaned against the cushioned carriage; a drooping curve of loosened hair, shining in the light like molten brass, fell over her cheek and neck; her profile, half hidden, was at once petulant and relaxed with drowsiness.

Damier did not hesitate. He sprang into the carriage. Not touching the girl, he leaned over her. "Claire," he said.

In an instant she had started into erectness, staring stupefied, too stupefied for shame or anger.

"I have only a moment," said Damier, speaking with a clear-cut dryness of utterance. "If you will come back with me, and marry Monsieur Daunay,--he knows all and will marry you,--half of my income is yours for life."

After the first stare she had blinked in opening her eyes to the light and to the sudden apparition; the eyes were now fixed widely on him; they looked like two deep, black holes.

"It is a bribe," she said.

"Call it so if you will."

"It shows your scorn for me."

"Comprehension of you, rather."

"And if I don't?"

"If you don't I will challenge this man--and fight him. I am an excellent fencer, an excellent shot."

She looked at him, half scoffing, yet half believing. "Englishmen don't fight duels."

"This one will."

"He might kill you."

"I might kill him; you would have to take the risk."

She shrugged her shoulders. "*Bien!* I understand, too. I will fulfil myself." She half rose, then sank again. "How much?" He mentioned the sum--not a small one. "Make it two thirds," said Claire, keeping her dilated eyes upon him with an effect of final and defiant revelation.

"Two thirds, then," he assented, in the steadied voice of one who does not dare hurry indecision. Yet, even now, she did not rise.

"One more condition, please. I do not see my mother again. Let us say, if you like, that I am ashamed to meet her."

"She has not been told--of this."

"Yes, she has," said Claire. "I wrote and told her." There was the satisfaction of achievement in the way she said it. "Oh, yes; she knows."

"Yet, even after that,--your vengeance, I suppose,--I hardly dare make the promise for her,--she can forgive--even this."

"Ah," and the hoarse note was in Claire's voice, "but I can't take forgiveness from her. I have left the world where such episodes as this need forgiveness. Tolerance is now all that I will endure--and she will never tolerate. No; I will not come with you; I will not return to Monsieur Daunay and to respectability--unless you promise that I shall never see her again."

"I promise it, then, if it is the condition."

"You accept? *Bien!*" Claire sprang up, and ripping an illustration from a magazine, she scribbled on the blank back, "Have decided, after all, that I won't come," transfixed it with a hat-pin to the cushioned back of Lord Epsil's vacated seat, then, as rapidly, reached for two of the bandboxes, pulled them, rattling, from the racks, stooped and jerked a large pasteboard box from under a seat, and, encumbered as she already was, caught up from among the rugs and bags several smaller packages, dexterously holding them to her sides with her elbows.

Damier, who had stared, hardly comprehending, gripped her wrist. "Put them down." She gazed round in sincere amazement; then, with quite a humorous laugh, dropped the booty. "I really forgot! No, it wouldn't be fair play, would it?--though, I confess, I should like to take a little vengeance; he has irritated me, been too complacent, too assured. This, too?" She touched the silk traveling-cloak. Damier, without speaking, stripped it off her; then, catching her by the arm, he almost dragged her from the carriage, for her feet stumbled among the dressing-cases and the abandoned boxes.

He found, as they almost ran along the dim platform across to the one opposite, and as he pushed her into a compartment of the Paris train that stood there, that she was laughing. The adventure of it, the excitement, Lord Epsil's discomfiture, appealed, evidently, to her sense of mirth.

There were other occupants of the carriage, and Damier was thankful for it. He did not want to talk to Claire. To reproach her would make him as ridiculous as beating a tin pan in the expectation of response other than a mocking cachinnation; not to reproach might seem to condone by comprehension. Yet, as she sank back into a corner, settled her shoulder in it, he saw that there was emotion under the laughter, that it was not only the tin-pan rattle. He could interpret it as almost a regret--a regret for something against which she had always rebelled, from which she had now finally freed herself, a sudden realization that forever she had lost the standing upon which he had found her. Yet, over this trace of emotion and suffering, that, to Damier, was more piteous than anything he had yet seen in her, she smiled at him, with half-dropped lids. It was the look, with her a new one, of brazening a shame. Already her nature had retaliated upon the wrong she had done it by fixing in her face a more apparent ugliness of expression. She glanced round at the sleepy, respectable occupants of the carriage, their sleepiness, however, keeping an eye upon this startling young person in her white dress.

"Before we relapse into an irrevocable silence," she said, "let me inform you--it will complete your evil opinion of me--that I didn't really care about him; I cared for his caring about me--though at moments even that fatigued me, *il m'embetait quelquefois*; but then, I was glad to be revenged."

"Upon whom? For what?"

"Upon you both--for making me feel that I was not of your world."

"We did not make you feel it, Claire."

For some moments they were silent, as the train moved slowly from the station, and then she said:

"Where will you take me?"

"To his cousin's, Mademoiselle Daunay's. I have arranged all with him."

A look, almost tremulous under its attempt at a light sneer, crossed her face.

"What forgiveness! *Il est un peu lache, vous savez.*"

"Try, Claire, to deserve such touching *lachete.*"

Again Claire was, for some moments, silent; then, yawning slightly, yet, again his acuteness guessed, affectedly, she said, settling her shoulder more decisively in her corner:

"There is the more hope for my deserving it since now I am rich. You may make your mind easy about my future. I have got all that I ever really wanted." It was the new and brazen note over the new shame; but as he looked at the face that first pretended to sleep, and that eventually did sleep, was not the brass the curious, anomalous shield that nature put around something growing--around a soul that at last, with a faint, half-conscious thrill, felt upon it the awakening breath of suffering?

XIX



HE morning was still fresh when Damier walked down the Rue B---- next day. Clear early sunlight fell upon the houses opposite Madame Vicaud's, glittering on their upper windows, gilding their austerity; but the depths of the street were still cool and unshadowed.

The concierge was sweeping out the courtyard, and fixed on Damier a cogitating eye; his early visit and Claire's absence were, no doubt, to her vigilant curiosity, symptoms of something unusual. The cogitation, though mingled with relief, was repeated at the door above in Angelique's look. She was plainly glad to see him. Madame Vicaud had sat up all night, she volunteered, quite as if accepting him as a member of the family, privileged to confidences; she thought that madame had hoped for mademoiselle's return, and she feared that the letter that had arrived from mademoiselle an hour before had much distressed madame. Perhaps Monsieur Damier could persuade her to have some coffee; she had eaten no dinner the night before, nor breakfast this morning. Damier promised to persuade, and Angelique ushered him into the salon.

He had never before seen it flooded with sunlight,--for this was his first morning visit,--and the windows overlooking the garden faced a radiant sky.

His eyes were dazzled, and the dark figure that rose to meet him seemed to waver in the light.

The calamity that had befallen her, at variance with the joyous setting in which he found her, showed in her white face--her eyes, still, as it were, astonished from the shock, dark with misery and a night of watching. On the table near which she had been sitting were a burnt-out candle, Lady Surfex's telegram of the night before, and a letter, opening its large display of vigorous handwriting to the revealing day: Claire's handwriting, Claire's letter of farewell. Damier took Madame Vicaud's hands and looked at her; the astonishment of her eyes hurt him more than their dry misery: after all, then, she had been so unprepared.

"I know all," she said.

"Not all."

"She has left me--with that man; she has written to me."

"Not all," he repeated.

"Is there more? There cannot be worse."

"There is better. She is safe."

"Safe? Do you mean that she did not go?"

Her eyes, with their sudden leap of light, burned him.

"No; she did go. But I followed them; I brought her back."

"Back to me? She was frightened at what she had done?" she again asked, her eyes still burning, but more dimly, upon him. His eyes dropped before them; looking down at the wasted hands he held, he said:

"No, dearest, not to you--to Monsieur Daunay. She is to marry him. She is with his cousin now."

Her vigil had evidently been tearless; even the arrival that morning of the fatal letter had not melted her frozen terror. But now, as she looked speechlessly at him, the long rise of a sob heaved her breast; her hands slid from his; she sank into a chair, and resting her crossed arms upon the table, she bent her head upon them and wept and shuddered. In the sunny stillness of the room the young man stood beside her. He felt an alien before this intimate, maternal

anguish. She did not weep for long. She presently sat upright, dried her eyes, and pushed back her hair, keeping her hand pressed tightly, for a moment, on her forehead, as if in an effort to regain her long habit of self-control; and as if to gain time, to hide the painful effort from him, she pointed to Claire's letter. "Read it," she said.

It was Claire's most callous, most ugly self; its passion of hatred and revenge hardly masked itself in the metallic tone of mockery. They were both well rid of her--her dear Mamma and her dear Mamma's suitor. They were far too good for her, and she justified them by showing them how far too bad she was for them. Pursuit and reproaches were useless. She feared that her dear Mamma's ermine robe of respectability must be permanently spotted by a daughter notoriously naughty--for she did not intend to hide her new situation. But perhaps the daughter could be lived down as the daughter's father had been. And on, and on--short phrases, lava-jets from the seething volcano of base vulgarity; Damier felt them burn his own cheek while he read.

Madame Vicaud's eyes were on his when he raised them; but quickly looking away from him, she said: "It came this morning. Last night I could not understand that telegram; I could not believe that she would not return. I felt that something was being hidden from me; it was like battling in a stifling black air. And then--this came." He had laid the letter beside her, and she touched it with her finger, as if it had been a snake. "This--this end of all!"

"She is safe," Damier repeated rather helplessly.

"Safe!" the mother echoed. Leaning her head against the chair-back, she closed her eyes. Lovely and dignified even in her disgrace, nothing could smirch and nothing could abase her; she had never looked so noble as at this moment of dreadful defeat and overthrow. "And how have you saved her?" she asked. "What did Monsieur Daunay have to offer--what did you have to offer--to bring her back--since it was not repentance? It was not repentance?"

"No; but I believe that she was glad to come. I--I dowered Claire," said Damier, after a momentary pause.

Madame Vicaud, still keeping her eyes closed, was silent. He leaned over her and took her hand. "All that I have is yours. You dowered her, let us say."

"What do you mean by dowering her?" she asked.

"I have given her two thirds of my income for life."

Her hand in his was chill and passive; he felt in her the cold shudder of shame.

"Ah," he said, "from me--from me you do not resent such saving?"

"Resent?--from you?" she said gently. "No, no; it is of her I am thinking. No; you did well, very well to save her--if we may call it saving. You have washed the spots from my respectability. We both know the value of such washing; but it is best--best to have us all respectable,"--a bitter smile touched her lips,--"since it is that we prize so. And were there no other inducements?"

"There was a condition,"--he had to nerve himself to the speaking of it,--"that she did not see you again. She has, by her own wish, broken the bond between you. She has left your life."

Madame Vicaud clenched her hands, and her chin trembled.

"Yet--let me tell you," he said, "I believe that there is more hope for Claire so left in the evil and abasement she has made about herself than if she were to have remained with you; all the forces of her nature were engaged in resistance, or in a pretended submission that bided its time. Now she must do battle with the world on a level where life will teach her lessons she can understand. She has severed herself completely from you--she has completely fulfilled herself. Some new blossoming may follow; who knows?"

"But no blossoming for me. I shall not see it," said Madame Vicaud. "My life has been useless."

Useless? He wondered over her past, her long efforts, this wreck.

Could goodness, however clear-sighted, however divine in its comprehension and pity, prevent evil from working itself out, fulfilling itself? Was not its working out perhaps its salvation?

"How can you tell?" he said. "You have done your work for her."

"I have done nothing for her. Everything has failed." Still, with closed eyes, she leaned her head against the chair, and slow tears fell down her cheeks.

"You have fulfilled yourself toward her; that is not failure. You have fought your fight. Surely it is the fighting, and not its result, that makes success. And can you say that everything has failed--when you still have me to live for? Claire has gone out of your life. She has shut the door on you. She has left you, and--oh, dearest, dearest, she has left you to me!"

He stood before her, looking at her with faithful eyes. His love for her made no menace to her grief; it did not jar upon her sorrow; rather it was with her in it all, it could not: be separated from it--as he could not be separated from any part of her life.

"You are alone now," he said, "and I am alone."

"No,"--she put her hand out to him,--"no; we are not alone."

"Then--" The air was golden, and in the open window, white flowers, set there, dazzled against the sky. This day

of sunlight and disaster must symbolize the past and the future, as her eyes, with their silent, solemn assent, her face, so sweet and so sorrowful. She rose; he drew her toward him. But then, as though another consecration than embrace and kiss were needed for this strange betrothal, she walked with him, holding his hand, to the window, where the white flowers dazzled in the sun. She looked at the flowers, at the trees, at the splendid serenity of the morning sky, softly breathing the clear, radiant air--as though in "a peace out of pain."

"We will go away," said Damier, who looked at her; and, despite his sorrowing for her, the day seemed to him full of wings and music. "I do not want to see Paris again, do you? And this will be our last memory of it--these flowers, this garden, this sky, that we look at together. We will think of it so, without pain almost, in a new, new life."

"A new life," she repeated gently and vaguely. Lifting his hand, she kissed it. "You have rescued me from the old one. You are my angel of resurrection," she said.

Yet that the future was dim to her, except through his faith in it,--that, indeed, it could never become an unshadowed brightness,--he knew, as, leaning against him, needing protection from her bitter thoughts, she murmured in the anguish of her desolate and bereaved motherhood: "Oh--but my child!"