Aunt Beardie

A Mystery Novel

by Joseph Shearing, 1886-1952

Published: 1940
Harrison-Hilton

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Prologue

1789

A young man lay on a hard bed and stared at the square of bright blue sky he could see from his attic window. He was ardent and ambitious and his plans were taken up with a brilliant future. It should not be so difficult for him to gain all he wanted, he argued to himself, for these were tempestuous times, when the ordinary rules of society were set aside, and it was only strange and embittering that he had not already found a chance of enriching himself.

It was true that he was poor and of humble birth and of humbler occupation, but he had taken great trouble with himself and he was naturally gifted—sharp-witted, adroit, of distinguished manners and a noble appearance—strange heritage for one who was little more than a peasant! So far he had not been able to turn these advantages to much account. Many circumstances that he tried to forget had been against him, and he was still no more than twenty years of age.

He did not notice the square of blue sky nor the coral-coloured buds of apple blossom against it, resting on the gnarled, lichen-covered boughs; nor did he hear the shrill, lilting songs of the birds that fluttered to and fro in the old grey trees, or note the bittersweet smell of earth newly wet by rain, or the almost intangible odour of springing grasses.

He was unconscious, too, of the hardness of the pallet on which he rested, of the poverty of his attire, for with his well-kept hands clasped behind his dark head he was staring into a golden future. He wanted everything that evoked the lust and ambition of ordinary men: money and fame, an easy life with an heroic lustre, a beautiful woman for his wife, and noble friends to be subservient to him.

The scope of these desires was one reason for his ill success; every chance that had come his way had seemed to him too mean for his abilities. He did not want to shine in his native suburb, or even to be a great man in his native town. He longed always for large affairs, and often turned over in his active mind how he might make the acquaintance of those in high places.

This dreamer felt that his gifts were sufficiently brilliant to allow him to await patiently a fine chance. He had not been idle; there was his daily work, his humble work, his part to play among his fellows.

And he had to be careful not to arouse their suspicions about anything unusual, possibly dangerous, in his manner or mind, for these were times when a man might be clapped on the shoulder in the morning by the hand of authority and be a headless corpse by the evening.

But with the few pence at his command he had purchased books, and in the attic that was his allotted chamber and was too poor a place to excite anyone's curiosity, he had studied, using logic and imagination instead of experience, teaching himself all that he believed would be useful when he had achieved his ambition and moved easily among the wealthy and the nobly born. Whenever he went abroad he marked eagerly those of better condition than himself, how they behaved and spoke, what manner of dress they favoured.

He had strong natural gifts of dissimulation also, and it often amused him to play different parts, altering the tone of his voice, even the lines of his face, adjusting his garments so that his personality was quite disguised.

Though his thoughts were wholly selfish and of his own aggrandisement and the glory that should one day be his, they were not without a certain gloss of grandeur. They had the purity and the simplicity of youth, and his face, framed by dark masses of chestnut hair and lit by the sun falling through that poor, unglazed window, had a not ignoble beauty, while the unconscious smile that lifted his lips as he dreamed had charm and pathos, as well as hard and cynical lines.

Part I

1794

The fugitives were at the end of their resources, quite overwhelmed by terror and dismay.

M. de Saint-Alde looked at his daughter in despair. What a fool he had been! He had always considered himself a capable man, but then, he had never been faced by circumstances so atrocious as these.

What was he to do? Where to go? He had weathered five or six years of storms successfully, keeping in with this side and that, using his enormous fortune, as he thought, entirely to his own advantage, to save him not only from debt and imprisonment but to keep him in a comfortable position. And here he was, stranded, with his young daughter, almost a child, on his hands. And what was in front of him?

The last, and as he feared the crowning, misfortune was that the servants had left them. And here they were in this inn, in the suburb of Orleans, not knowing where to turn and with a hubbub increasing about them. His one small consolation was that his daughter did not seem to realize her peril or even to fret at her discomfort. She sat looking plump and sleepy, like a stupid little bird, on the hard chair in the dirty parlour, her head nodding on her bosom, her eyes blinking drowsily.

Poor child! M. de Saint-Alde's agitation almost overcame him. He knew what had happened to girls no, older than she was, in Paris where now anarchy ruled.

But that he should have failed like this!—that was so inexplicable. He who had been so cautious, who had friends in every camp, or so he had thought...

The host of the Saint-Louis looked at him suspiciously. M. de Saint-Alde had lost his usual prudence, his usual sense of men and matters, his worldly understanding. He stammered out his orders afraid to spend too much or too

little. He gave the stupid story that he was a merchant, travelling in wine, that his servants had fallen sick.

The host walked away, shrugging his heavy shoulders. He was not interested in the lies that fugitives told him.

'Perhaps,' thought M. de Saint-Alde bitterly, 'he is going to denounce us to the police.'

Then with his native shrewdness and common sense piercing through the confusion of his distress, he thought: 'Tell what to the police? What have I done? They can bring nothing against me, nothing!'

But he knew that this logic was in the circumstances mere foolishness. He did not need to have 'done anything.' He had attracted the attention of those in power who disliked him, who envied his wealth. All his money would be confiscated, all that fortune he had piled up with so much difficulty...

He thrust his fingers into his hair, which was damp with sweat.

'I must control myself, I must get some courage. What must be done? Where can we go?'

It had been exactly like a lunatic nightmare, and he had had a good many nightmares in the last few years.

That hurried flight from Paris to Versailles, when his loan to d'Artois was discovered, believing that there it would be quiet and safe, and then the warnings from friends, the meeting of those whom he believed to be spies in the streets, the arrival of the frightened woman with whom he had placed his daughter, for safety as he believed, saying that she could no longer have the responsibility... the child looking at him, asking him what was to become of them, what was happening, and yet all the while quite trusting and good-natured, which in a way made matters worse... his frantic attempts to find 'a woman friend to look after the girl, or even a maid. Impossible! Everything in confusion!

And then the sudden resolve to fly with all the money he could lay hands on. Where? To England, he supposed, though he had no great love for that country. But it was the nearest asylum. And with money one could buy security and comfort, he still believed, anywhere.

But how to get to England? He almost beat his fists on the table, soiled with sops of wine and crumbs, in his impotent distress.

Why, they might be murdered and robbed that very night. He had gold and his dead wife's jewels worth a considerable amount in his valise. There was the carriage, too—he had had to pay an extravagant price for that, though it was the shabbiest equipage he had ever ridden in. It was waiting in the inn yard now. Should he spend his money in pay ing for horses to take them farther? But take them where? And dare he trust the postillions?

The best thing he could do would be to get to Brittany; he knew that country. St. Malo—that was the place. But he had no map. 'I must have lost my head like a coward,' he thought. 'I came away in such a hurry I didn't bring anything that was essential.'

He had got passports, but one needed to renew passports every few months when the chief of the Government changed. His identity papers were weeks old and might be of no use. The men who had signed them might already have gone to the guillotine.

For myself I don't care,' he said to himself mechanically, as the host brought in a litre of sour wine and placed it on the table before him, 'but for Estienne it is horrible.'

This was not sincere, although the reflection was made in the privacy of his own mind. Deep in his heart he did care for life, for his own safety. He had been successful and had enjoyed his existence, relished his brilliant career and the handling of large sums of money, enjoyed his social success. He was still a youngish man, though worn out by work and pleasure. He was very much afraid of prison and of violent death.

Trying to control himself, he went over to his daughter. She asked him sleepily when they were proceeding on their way and where they were going.

The terrors of the time did not seem to afflict her, even unconsciously. She had been at her pension for demoiselles since she was five years old, when her mother had died she was almost a stranger to her father, but her soft youth and her foolishness moved him to an almost uncontrollable tenderness.

He patted her hand, his own flesh trembling as he touched hers.

"We shall be all right, we shall be gone in a while. Rest yourself, my child, rest yourself. Eat your bread and milk, anything they give you."

"Oh, I'm not hungry, Papa, I ate so many biscuits and so much fruit in the coach. I think it would be better to go on." She looked round with ingenuous disgust. "It is very dirty," she added, "is it not? I do not like the look of the so vulgar people."

"Hush, hush, my child, you must not say those things, you do not know who is around us."

The banker returned to the table, glanced at the wine with a shudder and pushed it away from him. He did not want that to upset his digestion and fuddle his mind still further. He had felt ill ever since they had left Paris. Even at Versailles his stomach had been turned constantly by some queasy sight or smell. He was not as strong as he had thought he was, his head throbbed and he was subject to fits of giddiness. He was a stout man, not ill-looking, but out of condition. He sat there in his handsome clothes, his flabby face in his hands, trying to think of a way out...

The landlord put his head, garnished with a greasy red cap, around the door and said insolently: "The police will want to see the passports of the citizen and the citizeness." And with that had slammed the door again.

'Shall I bribe him?' thought M. de Saint-Alde. Then a wave of almost suffocating bitterness overcame him. He thought of the five million livres that he had lent to M. d'Artois. Why, it had been that sum of money which had enabled the Prince to escape to the Rhine, where he lay now with a considerable army, comfortable, even luxurious, on basketfuls of English gold!

'If I could only get there,' thought M. de Saint-Alde. 'I'd get it back out of him or live on him indefinitely.'

What a fool he had been! He had thought his loan a measure that secured his future. At the time it had seemed that the Revolution could not last long and that the Bourbons would soon return. And then what might he not exact in the way of gratitude for that large sum of money!

But no, the Prince had fled, and letters written to him at his camp on the Rhine had not been answered.

'But I've got the papers,' thought the banker, patting his waistcoat, 'and I'll keep them. Maybe it'll be all the dowry that Estienne will ever have.'

Yes, there were the Prince's papers, with his seal and bond to repay, and at a handsome interest, the five million livres that enabled him to escape the scaffold his brother and sister-in-law had mounted. Then how much more good money had been spent in bribing members of the Convention, trying to keep them his friends and on his side! What a fool he had been! He had really believed that they thought him useful, even necessary, that they counted on his advice, that they wanted him to keep his bank open.

He tried to stop his thoughts. He remembered the papers that one who was still his friend had shown him. There was his name on a list of proscribed. That meant the guillotine, perhaps, two or three days after his arrest.

Well, he had got as far as Orleans. He reached out a trembling hand, hardly knowing what he did, and after all gulped down the sour wine.

The door opened and the banker started, thinking that this was the police, but a young man of prepossessing appearance stood inside the doorway, looking at him shrewdly.

The banker, confused, taken aback, rose and bowed. He might be speaking to some high local functionary for all he knew.

The bow was returned courteously and the young man came to the table. He was tall and well made and wore a long green travelling-coat with several capes, a beaver hat stuck at a rakish angle, and his dark chestnut hair in a horn buckle. His features were pleasant, even noble, although their complete symmetry was spoiled by the fact that his eyes were rather too deep-set and too close together. He had a bearing at once proud and dignified, and his greeting to M. de Saint-Alde was cordial.

"I heard," he said, with a slight air of mystery and speaking softly, "that a gentleman—a nobleman, perhaps—was in this little inn with a young lady—his daughter, possibly."

The young man's voice was low and pleasant and was raised at each of these questions. 'The banker, thinking that he had found a friend, perhaps a protector, nodded eagerly; he was past subterfuge and attempts at discretion.

"Yes. You are a resident in Orleans, you are prepared to help me, monsieur? I cannot tell you how grateful—I am not unknown in Paris."

The stranger put his finger on his lips.

"We will not exchange names, if you please," he remarked. "At least, I do not care to give mine. The reason in these times you may find easy to guess."

"Certainly, certainly," agreed M. de Saint-Alde, also keeping his voice low. "But I should like you to know who I am." And he gave his name and a brief recital of his history of The last few weeks.

The young man listened attentively.

"I am in some difficulties myself;" he admitted. "I am afraid I cannot imitate your frankness and tell you what they are."

"Indeed, sir, I do not ask your confidences," protested M. de Saint-Alde. Of weak and indolent nature, he clung at once and almost desperately to this younger, stronger man who seemed in everything more resolute and more capable. "If you could help us..." he stammered, and glanced towards his daughter, who was now sound asleep in the hard chair with the chintz-covered cushions.

The young man looked in the same direction. His eyebrows went up slightly.

"I see your situation, monsieur, with so young a girl—why, she is little more than a child."

"And motherless. I was not able to obtain a maid or any other female to accompany her. What do you suggest we do?"

"I suggest you leave the country," replied the young man, narrowing his eyes and tapping in a determined manner with his forefinger on the table. "Neither you are safe nor am I. I am making for the coast myself. I am, as it happens, a Breton, I know Brittany like the palm of my hand and I intend to go to St. Malo. You will find it crowded with refugees, no doubt, but I believe it will be possible to get a ship to take us to Plymouth."

These words were like balm to the distracted banker.

"May I put myself in your hands?" he begged. "I have a certain sum of money with me."

"That should make it easier, but in these times it is not possible always to purchase even bare safety with large amounts of money. But if you will put yourself in my hands I will see what can be done."

Without saying so in so many words, he then gave the banker to understand that he was an émigré, that he bore a well-known name and was in considerable danger; that he had been to Paris on some secret and difficult mission and now was endeavouring to return to England to communicate with some royal prince, possibly the Duc de Bourbon, M. de Saint-Alde thought, who was in hiding there.

There was nothing in the young man's manner or appearance to belie this story. He was dressed in middle-class fashion, it was true, but then, as he had said himself, he was in disguise. When the landlord entered he spoke to him with the gesture and accents of a man of the people, but M. de Saint-Alde was quite ready to accept that as part of the disguise also.

After half an hour's conversation he had put his affairs, with a sigh of the most desperate relief, in the hands of this capable young man, who at once proceeded to engage horses, a coachman and a postillion.

M. de Saint-Alde had pressed into his hands a wallet full of gold, and the young man appeared to make pretty good use of this. He got the man and child out of the inn, had their passports sent to the Town Hall, countersigned and brought back, and by the middle of the June night they were all three on the road that was to lead them by quick stages and with little repose to St. Malo.

The banker's worst anxiety was relieved by feeling himself again a free man and treated as a respected member of the upper class as he sat in the coach with his daughter sleeping against his shoulder, and he now began to thank the young man for his services and to express the hope that he had not taken him from his own affairs.

"No," said the stranger. "Indeed, I am only too honoured to be of service to one so distinguished in the Royalist cause"—and he bowed in the narrow space of the coach gracefully enough—"as yourself, M. de Saint-Alde. If I must still delay giving you my name, it is not because I mistrust you but because I am under a vow not to disclose it. As it is awkward, however, for me to be incognito, pray call me M. Bernard."

"I assure you, my dear monsieur," replied the grateful banker, "I had not the least curiosity to learn who or what you are or what your mission is. Indeed, I feel as if I had had enough of politics and intrigue for all my life. It is sufficient that you have given me such inestimable advice and service. I hope I shall live to repay you."

And full of confidence and relief and even of joy in the reaction from his late state of terror, the banker disclosed to his friend that he had lent a large sum of money to M. d'Artois, and he tapped his breast where he kept the precious papers with the Bourbon seal and the signature of the young Prince.

"Of course, my dear monsieur," he concluded, "this revolution will soon be over, the State will be at rights again, and the Comte de Provence on the throne, for we must conclude that the Dauphin has been murdered like his father."

"Then you, M. de Saint-Alde," said the young man, leaning back in the carriage while his eyes gleamed in the faint glow of the lamp that fell through the open window, "will be an extremely rich and extremely fortunate man. Why, you will have titles, orders, perhaps a dukedom, and some noble man, maybe a Prince for your daughter."

"Oh, I don't rate my services as highly as that," said M. de Saint-Alde, with a slightly unctuous laugh, for he did indeed see the future in some such rosy glow as the other traveller had depicted.

He explained, with a sigh, that his daughter was his only child; he had had two sons, but they had died young. His wife had died some years ago, also, and he was not inclined to marry again.

"Indeed, I have been absorbed in affairs, in keeping my head above water, in running the business of the bank, you understand. Though I don't hope for anything so extravagant as you suggest, I suppose indeed that I shall get my reward when the Bourbons are restored."

"You should claim something handsome for your devotion."

"Oh, I am glad to risk my neck out of pure loyalty."

The young man looked out of the window. The artificial light of the carriage lamps, the misty blue of the rising moon, outlined his profile with an unearthly light. The banker, for a brief second, was disturbed by something in that face, a lift at the corner of the lips that was hardly a smile, a downcasting of the eyelids. As if an icy hand had pinched his heart, terror shot through the fugitive. Suppose he is a spy? Some creature of the revolutionary Tribunal?

The next instant, M. de Saint-Alde, who was always sanguine, dismissed this terror. But the young man, who certainly was extremely acute, appeared to have sensed this suspicion, for he turned his head slowly and remarked:

"You have been very trusting, M. de Saint-Alde. You put into my hands your life, your daughter, your money—everything you have."

"I cannot be deceived in one of your bearing," said the banker, bowing. "It is obvious that you are of distinguished birth, shall we say a nobleman? I have no reason to doubt your tale that you are on an important secret mission. After all," he added, rather lamely and foolishly, "you might have doubted me."

"I have seen your picture in the public prints, and read something of your career in the news-sheets and gazettes. You gave yourself out as a revolutionary. You were one of the Commissaries of the Public Treasury, and this help you gave to the Royalists must have been all done secretly."

"My dear monsieur, how on earth could I have remained in Paris had I not given out that I was on the side of the revolutionaries? And a pretty penny it cost me to keep in their good graces. I was even an officer in the National Guard."

M. Bernard, as he wished to be called, had hitherto taken no notice of the girl, but now he glanced at her, narrowing his eyes in an effort to discern her sleeping form that, cloaked and hooded, pressed against her father's side.

"It is very trying for mademoiselle. Does she not find such hurried journeying, such lack of rest, troublesome?"

"She's a schoolgirl," replied the father, "she understands nothing. She knows that for business and political reasons I am obliged to leave France hurriedly. Indeed, she has shown no concern. She is either very courageous or, poor child, very stupid."

"Shall we not call it innocence?" smiled M. Bernard. "A rose leaf blown before the storm! What shall it know where it goes or whence it came!"

This remark uttered in a thoughtful tone surprised M. de Saint-Alde. Again he had a slight touch of that queasy-uneasiness concerning the character of his companion. But he had, as M. Bernard himself had said, put everything in this stranger's hands, and it was too late now to think of anything in the way of doubt or suspicion. He was himself, this stout, tired man, extremely exhausted. He had hardly slept; it had been indeed a panic-stricken flight ever since he had left Paris... one disaster after another, and they crowded into his mind now, preventing him from resting—beginning with the desertion of his servants and his clerks...

Again M. Bernard seemed to read his mind, for he remarked coolly:

"You have had one good piece of good fortune, M. de Saint-Alde. You have kept, you told me, your valise with the money."

"Yes, and some banker' drafts too. They will be honoured in Lombard Street. And others, too, on Hamburg. I shall not be too badly off until the storm blows over."

"Have you enough to hire a boat? We shall find a number of refugees, as I said, at St. Malo and it may be difficult to get passages. But if you can pay a good round sum—"

"I would rather go as a passenger, both myself and my daughter. If I spend too much money on hiring a boat, what shall I have to live on when I reach England?"

"Well, leave it to me. I shall make as good a bargain as possible. I can assure you that I am no novice at this sort of business."

M. de Saint-Alde took this to mean that M. Bernard had been to and fro several times since the Revolution began and was an adept at making all the necessary tedious and perilous arrangements.

So it proved; they had no difficulties at any of the halts; M. Bernard acted as courier and steward of all, their fortunes. He spent very little of the money that M. de Saint-Alde gave him—less than a quarter, perhaps, of what the agitated banker would himself have scattered as bribes and fees. And when they reached St. Malo, both father and daughter were in fairly good spirits.

The girl had the resilience of youth. She liked the strangeness of the adventure, such a contrast to the monotonous days at her school where only now and then had disjointed tales of the strange happenings in the outer world come through. She had read something about England and looked forward to seeing that country. She scarcely remembered her mother and she had had no home life so she had nothing to regret in leaving France. Never before, indeed, had she had her father's company for so long a period, and his kindness to her,

and the solicitude of M. Bernard for her comfort, were very grateful to one who had hitherto been merely a little girl, snubbed, ignored and lectured.

Estienne was fourteen years of age and it was impossible as yet to see what manner of woman she would become, though her good breeding was obvious. She was plump, well developed, with a brilliant complexion, black hair, blue eyes and indeterminate features. Naturally lazy, she was also ignorant and inexperienced to a degree unusual even for so young a girl, for she had never had a mother's teaching in social usages nor any companions of her own age beyond the other girls in the pension who had taken no heed of her because she was so indolent and dreamy and seldom mingled in their gossip or their sport.

The absconding maid had taken with her most of Estienne's band-boxes and valises and she had little with her besides the white-sprigged muslin dress with the pink sash, the pearl-coloured pelisse and chip straw bonnet that she wore.

St. Malo was, as M. Bernard had predicted, full of refugees waiting for boats to take them to Plymouth or, in some cases, Hamburg. Most of the inns were full, but their young escort contrived to find accommodation for the banker and his daughter without much difficulty, although the lodgings consisted of but two closet-like rooms of an inn in a suburb of the town. These, however, were clean and the landlord and his wife civil.

A good meal was at once provided, and the weather was balmy and sunny. The sea, which they were so soon to cross in leaving their native land, perhaps for ever—this thought was in the background of M. de Saint-Alde's mind, optimistic as he was—lay smooth and glittering as glass.

The perils that they had been through lay behind them, dark and sombre, hardly to be believed, and their spirits rose at the prospect of life again in the new land.

M. de Saint-Alde knew himself to be a good financier, he had important connection in London and knew besides several well-known people there. Now that he had control of his nerves again it was not difficult for him to visualize a very successful career in London. His gifts for business and finance could not be ignored or kept down. His ancient title, his proud lineage, would help him he knew well enough. He would be able to have his daughter taken under the wing of some compassionate English gentlewoman; altogether the future did not look at all grey, mid M. de Saint-Alde beamed pleasantly on the young man who had achieved what seemed to him almost a miracle.

M. Bernard looked a little tired and strained from the fatigues of the journey, all of which he had taken on his own shoulders. But he was extraordinarily sharp, adroit and clever; as M. de Saint-Alde noticed with great admiration. He surely must be a person who had done this sort of thing again and again, he pondered, when the young man came and told him of the round sum for which he had sold the carriage and how modestly he had contrived to settle the dues of the postillion and the coachman.

The one difficulty now was to find a ship; passages were all booked on the packets that lay in St. Malo harbour, for there had been in the last few days well-founded rumours of risings in Brittany and the native nobility were hurrying from their châteaux as fast as they could gather a few valuables together.

"We shall have to hire a boat," said M. Bernard. "There is a small packet that is willing to take us to Plymouth for not too high a sum. It is possible that I might find someone to share this expense with us."

"With us!" exclaimed M. de Saint-Alde in a tone of delight. "Is it possible, my dear fellow, that you are going to England with us?"

"My destination is certainly England," replied the young man, with a quiet smile. "If it pleases you, I will accompany you on the same packet, paying, of course, my share of the expenses."

M. de Saint-Alde bowed. Nothing could have delighted him more. This would mean that all the troubles of the voyage would fall on his young friend's shoulders. And as for the money, he cared little about that; he had the indifference towards expense of the man always used to handling large sums. He still could not realize that he possessed nothing in the world but the gold in his valise. It seemed to him that he had the almost incalculable resources of the bank behind him. And, indeed, he was justified in supposing that he would easily make money when he reached London.

So he was lavish with what he had in hand, and never inquired how much M. Bernard was paying for his own expenses, although that young gentleman kept presenting scrupulous accounts. But the banker laughed them aside and told him good-humouredly that he might now hire the packet and be quick about it, and if he could find someone else to share the expenses so much the better.

This conversation took place in the morning, and by the early afternoon M. Bernard returned to the little inn in the suburb, Les Trois Etoiles, bringing with him a stout, elderly, red-faced man who was leading a pretty little girl.

"I found this good fellow down at the quay endeavouring to secure a packet for himself and his little mistress," said M. Bernard, "and I have brought him here, seeing that mademoiselle is about the same age as your own little daughter."

On seeing another girl, Estienne had come forward from the window-seat where she was sitting idly watching the sea—she had never seen the ocean before. She curiously examined the other young lady, to whom she at length courteously gave her hand and whom she kissed on the cheek.

Her elderly companion proved to be a servant of her father, M. de Vernon, the name of a noble Breton family well known to M. de Saint-Alde. The servant, with much agitation, for he deeply felt the responsibility of his little mistress's safety, told his story.

The entire Vernon family intended, upon the news that an insurrection in Brittany was imminent, to go to England, where they had friends. But at the last moment Madame de Vernon, who was expecting another child, found it impossible to travel. Her husband had remained behind to protect her and had sent his daughter with the servant, whose name was Gilles, ahead with a certain sum of money and a packet of introductions to English people. However, he was not supposed to need them as M. de Vernon, his wife and the baby would follow almost immediately, joining Gilles and his little charge, Vivienne, at Plymouth.

The old man, who had been in the service of the Vernon family all his life, as his father had been, had undertaken this mission with mingled zeal and trepidation. He was eager to serve his master to the death, but he was also almost overwhelmed by the responsibility for his daughter. All the women

servants had fled from the château, he explained, save wily his own daughter, who had remained in attendance on Madame de Vernon.

He concluded his simple and yet piteous story by saying that he had found it impossible when he reached St. Malo to engage passages for himself and his charge.

The money that his master had given him had not been sufficient, for M. de Vernon had not counted on such a rush of fugitives to St. Malo and the subsequent rise in the charges for hiring boats and securing passages.

M. de Saint-Alde was touched by the faithful servant's predicament, and commended M. Bernard for bringing him and the little girl to Les Trois Etoiles.

"My good fellow," he said, "your troubles are now at an end. You shall come with us—I have money for all. If you have not sufficient to pay your passage your master shall owe it me. Well do I know the Vernon family; their name is one of the noblest in the armorial of Brittany. Indeed, I believe that M. de Vernon's father was among my acquaintances and a client of the bank."

Gilles began to stammer out his gratitude and relief at being taken under the protection of a gentleman who would be able to bring so much more weight and influence to bear on their difficulties than he could himself. M. de Saint-Alde put all this aside good-humouredly.

"Look at the two demoiselles, how they have already made friends," he said, and he nodded towards the two little girls who were kneeling in the padded seat at the window of the inn parlour, pressing their noses against the glass and staring out to sea.

Vivienne was twelve years old, two years younger than her new friend. She had lived a very different kind of life, having been intensely happy with her young father and mother in the beautiful château with the farm and the home fields, and the tenantry and servants whom she had loved ever since she was a baby; it had required the utmost weight of her father's authority and her mother's tearful entreaties to leave all this with Gilles.

But something of her home-sickness and her regret at this hurried departure from her dear home was assuaged by the interest of this new friend. She had never been to a pension and had few companions of her own age. Like Estienne, she had had two brothers who had died very young. She remembered them with regret and told little anecdotes about them now to her companion.

The girls were soon, at this rate, on very good terms, although Estienne had little to talk about except a parrot, a dog and a cat—all of which had been beloved by her when she had been at the pension.

M. Bernard, who seemed inexhaustible, left the party for a while, but soon returned with the news that he had hired a boat. It was a German packet, the SACHSEN, captain Peter Henlein. For fifty livres, to be paid in advance, he undertook to take M. de Saint-Alde and his daughter, Gilles and Mlle de Vernon, and M. Bernard to Plymouth.

Half of this sum Gilles was about to produce, but M. de Saint-Alde waved it aside.

"Fifty livres will not make a large cut in what I have brought with me," he said, and he told M. Bernard to go to his portmanteau and take out the required amount.

It was M. Bernard who had packed the belongings of the banker, who himself had been too ignorant of the ways of the world and too unused to travelling in this fashion to conceal his gold with much success. It had all been tied together

in rouleaux of louis d'or in two large valises. These M. Bernard had taken out and distributed over the luggage, in the linings and hidden inside the rolled stockings and linen of monsieur and mademoiselle.

He now called Gilles aside and told him he was to play bodyguard over the money, not letting the two valises under any excuses out of his sight or anyone who handled them.

"It must not be suspected there's gold there," he said, "or we shall infallibly be robbed. And remember, it is all that you and your little mistress and M. de Saint-Alde and his daughter will have to depend on for some time to come."

After he had gone to conclude negotiations for the hire of the boat, Gilles asked M. de Saint-Alde who the young gentleman was, and the banker found that he had no answer ready.

But he replied with assurance, "Of course, my good fellow, you can see he is a gentleman, a nobleman, probably. He has good reason for his disguise, for I believe him to be on some secret mission for the Prince de Condé or the Duc de Bourbon in London."

And he added a good deal in praise of the young man who had rescued them, M. de Saint-Alde began now to think, from almost certain death.

The banker was rather surprised that Gilles did not at once acquiesce in his estimate of their protector, for now he had begun to think of M. Bernard as that.

"Under your permission, sir," said the servant, "but I don't know what to think. He doesn't seem to me, this M. Bernard, who has no title or nom de terre, to be an aristocrat."

The banker was surprised.

"I can't understand how you say that," he said, really baffled, for he knew that servants were quicker than anyone else at noticing class distinctions. "Of course, he disguises himself as a common fellow now and then. He alters his voice and his tone, and it is extraordinary the difference he can make in his face. But I never questioned his faith."

"No doubt he is honest," said Gilles with a deep sigh, "but I would myself that we were in the hands of someone we knew, not this mysterious stranger."

M. de Saint-Alde laughed; he was in a good humour.

That evening, before the sunset, the five of them embarked on the SACHSEN.

All went tranquilly on the voyage from St. Malo—the ship was small, rude, but decent accommodation was offered to the two young ladies, who were respectfully treated by Captain Henlein and his sailors; the food was wholesome and the men's quarters clean.

M. de Saint-Alde allowed his spirits to rise still higher. The golden weather was like a gloss over everything, and after all, what had he left behind that he regretted? The last few months, even years, had been full of pressing anxieties and continual alarms. He had had to scheme this way, plan that way, intrigue, bribe, flatter. Well, he was an adept at all that kind of thing; but he was glad it was over. He began, in sentimental mood, to plan a peaceful life for himself and his daughter, who still seemed a stranger to him, in England, famous, as he had always understood, for its domestic felicities.

Besides, he carried the major part of his fortune with him. What need to regret his handsome hôtel in Paris, his country house, richly garnished as they might be with furniture, pictures and tapestry? What need to regret his chests of silver and gilt when he carried with him the letter from M. d'Artois

acknowledging the debt of five million livres? That was certainly good for a dukedom when the Bourbons regained their own. And M. de Saint-Alde, although he had lived in the centre of events in Paris for so long, firmly believed that the Revolution had spent its force and that there would be a restoration in a few months' time, when the armies now gathering on the Rhine would march in triumph on the capital and restore a Bourbon on the throne of Saint-Louis.

M. Bernard seemed also in good spirits, but he kept himself rather apart from the people he had helped with such zeal and tact, and M. de Saint-Alde commended this withdrawal as a delicate courtesy.

M. Bernard had a cabin to himself and often had his meals there, although once or twice he appeared at the common table over which the captain presided.

M. de Saint-Alde had noticed two things—he was trained to observe—one was that there were several passengers on board the packet, although he believed that he and Gilles had hired it between them. The other was that the Breton servant appeared anxious, sombre and dissatisfied.

Sorry for his poor old man, who was weighed down by his sense of responsibility, M. de Saint-Alde took an opportunity of speaking to him, and the Breton at once broke out with what seemed to the banker a very curious suspicion. He said he did not like the ship, the captain, or those other passengers. Why did they keep themselves so apart, not speaking to anyone?

M. de Saint-Alde said he was not surprised at this, since they were obviously of an inferior class.

"I suppose the poor wretches could afford to pay very little and so were smuggled off at the very last minute. It certainly is not fair, for we bargained for the ship for ourselves; but who can refuse a charity under these circumstances? For myself, I have met with such good luck these last few days after experiencing such sharp reverses that I am not, my good fellow, inclined to grumble at such details as these."

"Maybe not, monsieur," replied the old servant heavily, but with the respect due to one of M. de Saint-Alde's rank. He looked at him wistfully. "I wish I could feel as secure as you do, monsieur. I have the charge of mademoiselle, you understand." He wiped his sweating forehead. "She is a very great responsibility. I am too old. Ah, that madame should have been brought to bed at such a moment! A few weeks one way or another and she could have crossed."

"It is indeed unfortunate, but I have no doubt that your master and mistress will soon follow and you will have a happy reunion at Plymouth."

"God grant that it may be so," sighed the Breton. He crossed himself and closed his eyes for a moment and the banker saw that his prayer was earnest and fervent.

"Why are you so downcast?" he asked kindly. "Look at me. I have, in a sense, lost everything, yet I am far more cheerful than you, who could have had very little to lose."

"I think of nothing," replied the servant, "but fulfilling my trust. I wish now that I had waited and booked passages on another packet. Now, that M. Bernard"—he lowered his voice—"I wish that you, monseigneur, were not so confiding and generous. I wish that I could be sure that this person is a gentleman, a young noble on an important mission. You have noted, sir," he added anxiously, "how he keeps himself apart?"

"I think that that is courteous, tactful behavior. He does not wish to force us to acknowledge an obligation, he does not wish to press his acquaintance upon us."

"I wish I could think so, monsieur."

"Why are you so suspicious of him?" asked M. de Saint-Alde curiously.

He was even a little amused at the doubts the servant had of the young man who had proved such a friend, almost a saviour, to himself and Estienne.

Then the servant confessed that he had been over M. Bernard's cabin when that young gentleman had been on deck and that he had found nothing there to satisfy him that the young man was of noble birth, not so much as a monogram, no sign of a coat-of-arms, nothing marked with a noble name...

M. de Saint-Alde was further amused; this was the first time that he had looked at life from a servant's point of view. Of course, they considered these things; they were always looking out for what he, as a nobleman, took for granted—coats-of-arms, armorial bearings, signet rings, all these trappings and fripperies that perhaps were going to be swept away soon, for ever. He looked thoughtfully at the servant, the good, honest old man who had his own values that nothing would induce him to forsake, and he said kindly:

"One must judge by other details. The young man said he was disguised, on a mission of great importance. No doubt he has been told to be very careful to destroy every evidence of his rank."

"But he should tell you, monsieur," urged Gilles earnestly. "There is no reason why he should keep it secret from you, who are also a fugitive and who bear a name and have a position and whom he cannot possibly mistrust."

This was said so earnestly and was such good common sense that for a moment doubt did flicker over M. de Saint-Alde's mind, but he dismissed it as he had dismissed the strange suspicion that had pierced him when he had looked at the profile of his new friend as they had driven in the coach through the night.

"No, I think he tells the truth, my good fellow," he said at length. "If only for this reason," he added with a smile, "that I cannot see any object for his telling me a lie. Who could he be, and what does he gain by the service that he renders me?"

"Great gentlemen," replied the servant mournfully, "although they may be clever and good men of business like monseigneur, still are strangely unsuspicious. You don't know the lower classes as I do, monseigneur." The servant shook his head.

"I have heard of adventurers who are willing to take advantage of these horrible times. I've learned to be suspicious of anyone who doesn't explain himself clearly. There are spies, too. One can't be over prudent."

The banker agreed that this was reasonable enough, but he added that the young man's appearance, dress and manner did not allow of his being the lowest type of scoundrel, as Gilles would make him out to be, for no one but the meanest of creatures, both in character and in birth, "would attach himself to me at the moment when my fortunes are so fallen that it is not likely I can reward anyone."

To this comment, the old man retorted by asking M. de Saint-Alde straight if he took M. Bernard for a gentleman.

The banker found it difficult to answer this truthfully. In fact the question seemed to him wholly unnecessary. There was something strange about the

young man, and he had noted more than once how easily he assumed different characters. But of his tact, skill and cool nerve there could be no question. There were certainly no insignia of aristocracy about the stranger, as Gilles had observed and the banker had noted for himself, yet he did not seem like a peasant or a clerk or indeed a member of the middle classes.

M. de Saint-Alde ended by shrugging his shoulders. After all, what did it matter? Once at Plymouth and they would probably never see M. Bernard again.

He concluded his meditation by saying:

"I think you can put your mind at rest, Gilles. This man—gentleman or adventurer—can do us no harm, and he has already done us a great deal of good. I owe him much gratitude and should not really be discussing him with you."

The servant bowed.

"I am glad to hear your opinion, monseigneur," he said, but he did not seem in the least reassured.

After they had been at sea two days, M. de Saint-Alde began looking out anxiously for the coast of England. As there was no sign of it and the placid horizon was unbroken by the white cliffs that he was so eagerly searching for, he went to the captain, asking him if they were out of their course and how it was in this fair weather that they had taken so long to reach the British coast.

Captain Henlein then informed him, drily, though civilly, that they were not making for Plymouth but for Hamburg. He added that he supposed one port was as good as another to the fugitives so long as they escaped from France, and in this weather the voyage to Hamburg would not take very long and that from that port they might very easily and at small expense remove themselves to England.

M. de Saint-Alde then vehemently reproached him for his deception, and the captain replied by saying that M. Bernard, the man who had engaged the ship, had not been very particular as to which port they made for and that his, Henlein's, port of register was Hamburg and he would not be able to land in England supposing he made for that destination.

M. de Saint-Alde was vexed, though not greatly disturbed. He had his banking connections in Hamburg as well as in London, and he had his ready money and his precious promissory note from M. d'Artois safely on his person. He knew that there were a very large number of refugees in Hamburg among whom he might find acquaintances and friends. Besides, if he did not like the place, no doubt, as Captain Henlein said, it would be quite easy to journey from there to England. Still, the deception was vexatious and he remembered that Gilles had warned him about the young man who had befriended them... on the other hand, he could not see what possible advantage M. Bernard could gain by landing himself in Hamburg. Indeed, if his tale was true, it would be the greatest inconvenience for him, for he was supposed to be bound, with important papers, for London.

He looked out for the young man, and finding him leaning against the taffrail in a melancholy attitude, told him of the captain's action.

At this M. Bernard showed more emotion than M. de Saint-Alde had observed him display before, and remarked passionately that the fellow was a scoundrel and that it did not suit him, M. Bernard, at all to go to Hamburg; he must put in to an English port...

He then went to find the captain, and M. de Saint-Alde, watching them curiously though not with much interest, saw that they were engaged in an animated conversation which seemed likely to lead to a quarrel. The end of it was, however, that M. Bernard returned to M. de Saint-Alde and said that there was no moving the captain from his resolve and they must make the best of their bad luck, only congratulating themselves that they had escaped from France.

"It plays the devil with all my plans," he complained gloomily. "I shall be late for my appointment in London. The first thing I must do when I get to Hamburg is to find out how I can obtain a passage in some vessel going at once to England."

M. de Saint-Alde then asked about the other people who had so kept to themselves during the voyage, and M. Bernard said he had spoken of them to the captain, who had told him they were all Germans, most of whom had been in service in France and were returning to their native country, and that they had known from the first that the vessel was bound for Hamburg.

"It does not seem to me," remarked M. de Saint-Alde good-humouredly, "that you were quite so clever as you thought you were, M. Bernard. You have picked on a dishonest captain and we have been deceived, and possibly swindled, since we paid in advance. It will cost us a great deal more to get to London via Hamburg than if we had gone to Plymouth."

At these reproaches, though so kindly given, M. Bernard seemed greatly disturbed and begged the banker to forgive him. This M. de Saint-Alde at once did; after all, he was not much annoyed by the setback, and he still remembered with gratitude the good services M. Bernard had rendered. They might, but for this stranger's help, be still waiting at St. Malo with every prospect of the "sans culottes" marching on the town, not only to rob them but to cut their throats as well. But there was one who did not take the news so placidly. To old Gilles it was a disaster, a confirmation of his worst terrors.

"It is impossible!" he exclaimed. "Good God, but it is impossible!" when M. de Saint-Alde told him kindly enough that the captain was making for Hamburg and that they were in his hands and it was no use putting up a resistance. "I have promised my master and mistress to bring my young lady to Plymouth. They will be waiting for me there. How am I to communicate with them? How send a letter?"

The old man's distress was piteous; he seemed like one who had received a mortal blow; he existed only to fulfil his trust to his master, and despite his own endeavours he had, as he thought, betrayed that trust. M. de Saint-Alde in vain tried to reassure him. It was not easy to persuade the old Breton, who had never left his native province, that he could send a message from Hamburg to Plymouth, because the banker himself knew that it would be difficult to do this. He urged him, however, to be calm and promised him that if he was short of money he, the banker, would advance him some to keep his young mistress in comfort until he could communicate with his master. But the old man's distress was not to be assuaged; it rose instead into a rage. He declared that this M. Bernard was a trickster and an adventurer and had betrayed them all.

"Don't you see, monseigneur, it doesn't suit him to take us to Plymouth. He doesn't want to be unmasked. You'd soon find out when we were in England that he was no Royalist spy or messenger. He wouldn't be able to keep the game

up there, he would have to prove who he was or disappear—and it wouldn't suit him to do either."

"Hush," said M. de Saint-Alde, "I am sure you are wrong. The young man is indeed as angry as we are, and remember the conditions at St. Malo. It was not easy to get passages at all."

The banker then took the agitated old man by the arm and led him away to his small cabin.

"I beg you, my good fellow, to take this setback quietly. I am responsible for my daughter as you are responsible for your mistress. They are two young girls, almost children, they have only us to protect them, and this M. Bernard. And, according to you, he is not to be relied upon. The captain is a German, the crew and those other passengers are German, or Swiss. They will have no sympathy with our desire to go to England; it suits them to go to Hamburg. You will understand, then, that we are helpless, and if we make any protest, disturbance or quarrel, we may find it very much the worse for us. I don't mind telling you that I carry a very large sum of money and I suppose you have a few valuables. These people, who have deceived us once, might attack us and rob us if they had the least provocation."

Gilles listened but did not seem to comprehend this good advice. He stood with mechanical respect before M. de Saint-Alde and, when that gentleman had finished, went with a stumbling gait out of the cabin; the banker followed, afraid that the old Breton would not be able to control himself.

Seeing the captain going up to the bridge, Gilles stopped him roughly, called him a scoundrel to his face, and pulling out a pistol that he had stuck in his belt, pointed it at him, declaring that he would have the boat turned towards Plymouth or shoot the man where he stood.

Captain Henlein had been prepared for something of this kind from one or other of his passengers and he was ready for it. The old man, strong as he was for his years, was no match for the stalwart German, who disarmed him by striking at his wrist, sent the pistol spinning down the deck and over into the sea, and then laid Gilles low by a blow to the chin. With that he passed on to the bridge, looking right and left as if to warn any other malcontents of the punishment that was likely to await them. M. de Saint-Alde called out for help, and two of-the crew lifted the fallen man and carried him down to his cabin, while the banker protested violently at the treatment meted out to the poor old man. The sailors, however, affected not to understand French. But presently a tatterdemalion kind of fellow who declared he was the ship's doctor came to examine the unconscious man. He spoke a few words of English, with which M. de Saint-Alde had a slight acquaintance, and informed him that Gilles was suffering from a stroke, apoplexy—some kind of fit.

"He is too old, he should not have come. He should have stayed and taken his fate. At his age one cannot run away from death."

So, with a leer, the self-styled physician, for M. de Saint-Alde believed he was nothing of the sort—left the cabin.

It was useless for the banker to call after him that the man was not suffering from a fit but from the results of the blow from the captain; M. de Saint-Alde felt that he was cornered, that the so-called doctor had been put forward to give evidence on the part of the captain so that there might be no fuss or possible inquiry when they reached Hamburg.

'As if we could do anything,' thought M. de Saint-Alde bitterly. His transient and superficial high spirits left him as he realized the desperate position he was in—a man who had lost his rank, his country, his citizenship, a man whose word would not be taken against that of the rascals on board the SACHSEN... they would say he was a refugee, a Frenchman flying from his own country, a criminal for all they knew, whose passports were false perhaps.

The distracted banker turned back to the cabin. The old man was still unconscious. Perhaps it was true, perhaps he had had some kind of fit from the shock of being felled by the heavy fist of the German captain. His features were drawn and congested, his eyes half-open. There was a wound on the back of his head, blood was congealing in the stiff white locks.

M. de Saint-Alde kept watch by him, giving him such medicines as he knew how to administer from his own travelling case—restoratives, and fresh bandages for his wounded head.

Once or twice M. Bernard looked in. He seemed deeply moved by this wretched incident, but warned M. de Saint-Alde with what the banker admitted was good common sense not to thwart the captain further.

"There's nothing to prevent the wretch murdering us all, throwing us overboard and stealing our luggage. As no doubt he would de if he knew the valuables we carry."

At that moment the banker felt that the valise full of gold, which he had thought of hitherto with such satisfaction, was a curse; remembering his daughter he winced with alarm.

Gilles recovered his senses for a few seconds; grasping with feeble, contracting fingers the warm plump hand of the banker, he tried to make a gesture towards the corner of his cabin where his small portmanteau stood. His withering lips endeavoured to form two words: 'the demoiselle'...

"Yes, yes, I understand! I promise!" said M. de Saint-Alde. "I will look after the young lady. I will give her your property, your papers, everything you have. I swear to you, by God"—he raised his hand and spoke solemnly—"I will do all in my power to keep the pact you cannot, and deliver Mlle Vivienne to her parents."

He did not know if Gilles had heard or not; the old servant sank into a stupor and before morning was dead.

The captain came to look at the body, by which M. de Saint-Alde still sat. He was not a religious man, but he had been on his knees, praying. The Breton had died without the last rites and consolation of his Church. That had been his final and supreme sacrifice to the family he had served so faithfully.

The captain repeated what the ragged-looking doctor had said—that the old fellow had died of a fit; he should never have undertaken the journey at his age. Then the body was sewn up in a tarpaulin and without ceremony cast into the sea, weighed down by two lumps of lead, the price of which Captain Henlein demanded from M. de Saint-Alde.

All the banker's energies were now concentrated on keeping the news of the tragic and unexpected death of her only friend and protector from Mlle de Vernon.

She shared a cabin with his daughter, and on the dawn of the day that Gilles died, M. de Saint-Alde, exhausted and overwrought, went down the passage to the cramped cabin, opened the door cautiously and looked in.

The two girls were asleep on the one couch, their arms lightly flung one over the other, their plump faces side by side. A dear friendship had sprung up between them, because of the similarity of their situations, their ages and their loneliness. The light, reflected from the water, beginning to glisten in the glow of the dawn, shone through the porthole on their closed eyes, candid brows and parted lips.

M. de Saint-Alde, who had thought so little of his own daughter in his crowded days at home, was now deeply moved by the sight of this youthful innocence. Neither of these girls had any protector, at least under the present circumstances, except himself. He hoped that he would be able to save them from all harm and indignity.

He noticed that on Mlle de Vernon's face were traces of tears. He remembered that she was not, like his own daughter, leaving a school with a neglectful father, but that she had been taken away suddenly and, as it were, violently, from a home where everything was dear and charming, from parents whom she passionately loved and who adored her. He noticed, even through his tender and poignant solicitude, the beauty of the girl who was, he had been told, but twelve years of age. Unlike those of his own daughter, her features were carefully and delicately formed. Her hair had that fair colour which was neither gold nor auburn nor silver but rather the hue of new cedarwood, and fell in smooth, heavy loops like bands of ribbon either side of her face and on to her shoulders.

The girls had not undressed; they wore their muslin day gowns, their pelisses spread over their feet, their sandalled toes showing from the edges of the garments. No blankets had been given them and it was cold on the water.

'I must,' thought M. de Saint-Alde, 'keep the news from her while she is on the ship. That will be difficult, but when we reach Hamburg it will be easier. I shall say that Gilles has gone ahead to find rooms. I shall take her to stay with me and Estienne, and then I must tell her that Gilles has gone ahead to Plymouth—I don't know, some tale to keep her quiet. The poor child! God save and protect us all!'

He closed the cabin door carefully and went in search of M. Bernard.

That young man was now composed, even cool, in his demeanour, and M. de Saint-Alde had ceased to ask himself whether he was an adventurer or a Royalist in disguise, a gentleman or a commoner. He was a fellow Frenchman, one who had professed friendship for him, and they stood together under peculiar, perhaps perilous, circumstances.

He told him of the death of Gilles and of his own undertaking of the guardianship of Vivienne de Vernon, and of the kind deception he meant to put upon her.

M. Bernard agreed at once to all these schemes; he declared he would be a party to them and do what he could to help look after the child and to distract her from the loss of her guardian.

This kind plan proved not very difficult of execution, for Vivienne de Vernon became slightly seasick, and was unable to leave her cabin.

Estienne waited upon her tenderly, and so absorbed were the two girls, one in her own malaise, the other in her new duties as nurse, that they never thought to question where Gilles was.

When Hamburg was reached, Vivienne had somewhat recovered, but her eyes were unnaturally bright, her cheeks flushed, and she was a little dazed and

bewildered as the other girl, on whom the motion of the ship had had no effect, helped her onto the deck.

Captain Henlein did not prove to be the complete scoundrel that M. de Saint-Alde had suspected him of being. Grateful, perhaps, that no inquiries were made into the death of Gilles, he gave his French passengers all possible assistance. He explained to the customs-house authorities how it was they had landed in Hamburg when they intended to go to England, smoothed over passport difficulties, and made no effort to detain, as M. de Saint-Alde was fearful he would, any of the baggage.

Henlein, who seemed to consider himself a hero for saving so many refugees, recommended to them a hôtel on the outskirts of the town, which he swore was occupied by honest, respectable folk. It was a place, he emphasized, where the young ladies might safely stay.

All this passed in broken English and such few words of German as M. de Saint-Alde could muster, for M. Bernard appeared to know no German whatever, and if he knew any English he did not bring it forward, but stood apart during these negotiations.

"I suppose we'd better go to this hôtel," said M. de Saint-Alde doubtfully, looking at the two girls sitting together on the valises, which had been placed on the quay. Vivienne had begun to miss Gilles and was crying softly on her friend's shoulder. The banker endeavoured to reassure her timidity.

"Your steward, your friend, mademoiselle, has gone into the town on some business," he explained lamely. "You must come with us, we will look after you."

"Yes," said Estienne, "you must be brave. We are not in England after all, we are in Germany; but we are safe."

"But it was at Plymouth I was to meet my father and mother, they will be waiting for me there!"

"Never mind, dear, we can send them a message. I believe Plymouth is quite near to Hamburg, isn't it?" Estienne looked imploringly at her father.

"Yes, yes, everything will be all right. You must not grieve yourself, my child."

He patted Vivienne kindly on the shoulder, then looked at M. Bernard, who was standing, motionless and silent, his hands clasped behind the long skirts of his green, many-caped riding coat, looking down at the two girls with a strange expression on his face. Was it a calculating look? M. de Saint-Alde wondered. Or was it pure compassion?

M. de Saint-Alde turned to the taciturn young man.

"Monsieur, I owe you a great debt of gratitude. I am afraid I cannot repay you at the moment. There is really nothing I can do for you in this strange city. But I remain deeply obliged to you. I shall be at your service in the future if ever I can repay."

He waited rather awkwardly at the end of this formal speech, expecting the young man to take his leave; but M. Bernard gave him a quick glance and said with a dry smile:

"I am afraid, monsieur, that you can oblige me, and immediately. I am penniless. I was to have met someone at Plymouth who would have given me money. I know no one in Hamburg. I am afraid I am dependent on your charity." He glanced at the valises as much as to say, 'I know that you have plenty of money, and in the most desirable form—gold.'

Instinctive breeding made M. de Saint-Alde reply at once: "But naturally, monsieur, what I have is at your disposal."

But his own fleeting suspicions and the clearly defined denunciation of poor Gilles occurred to him, and he added quietly: "Of course, sir, being, as you have said, a gentleman of rank and on Royalist business, you will be able to produce your credentials to some banking house here. You will be able, no doubt, among the refugees with which the place is, I understand, crowded, to find some friend or acquaintance. I can hardly suppose that one who is a Royalist messenger will be without resources in the city of Hamburg."

The young man's expression did not change.

"There are a large number of people who would stand guarantors for me if I cared to reveal my name," he said, "but at present I am under pledge not to do so. But if it is inconvenient to you, monsieur, to lend me a few livres—"

M. de Saint-Alde interrupted at once.

"I cannot unstrap the valises on the quay. Perhaps you will be good enough to see if you can hire a carriage and come with me to the hôtel that Captain Henlein recommended."

Despite his apparent ignorance of the German language, M. Bernard was able to secure a vehicle. The driver was told the name of the hôtel, and the two men and the two girls entered the carriage, with M. de Saint-Alde fervently commending himself to the many saints whom he had since his childhood forgotten.

The worst of his fears were not realized. The hostelry proved a pleasant enough place. It was a posting-house on the highroad, with a large beer-garden attached where tables were set out under vines already rusting and dusty from the summer heat. The rooms were large, cool and clean; according to M. de Saint-Alde's standard it was peasant accommodation, but he was thankful to have it and so easily.

The good woman of the house was all sympathy for the forlorn and tired young girls, and it was impossible to doubt her good faith and her good will as she mothered them up the wide, shining stairs to the best room the place afforded, followed by a stout chambermaid bearing hot water and clean towels.

The care of the two girls being thus for the moment off his mind, M. de Saint-Alde asked M. Bernard into the room he had chosen for himself.

Peasant accommodation indeed, but a pleasant place, and it stirred some nostalgia in his heart, as if once, in his long-lost youth, he had stayed at such a place and loved it... perhaps at his foster-mother's cottage in the South...he did not know, and put the thought from his mind.

The oak floor sloped to the door and was dark golden, shining from beeswax, and gave out a pleasant odour. The windows were latticed, and fide linen curtains, hand-worked with a blue design, were drawn across the midday sun. The vine leaves without made a moving pattern of shade on this white linen; similar curtains were at the bed tester; the coarse coverlet was white and fragrant.

Lulled by the smell of herbs and lavender M. de Saint-Alde felt far away from Paris, its mud-coloured streets, its processions and torchlight and drum-beats, the hot, dirty pavements, the excited slatternly mob and the guillotine and those pools of coagulating blood running between the cobbles that one came upon now and then. Yes, far away from all that...

He looked down at the valises with a sigh of relief. There was enough money for himself and the two girls he had under his protection to live quietly for some while. He felt a pang as he looked at the modest valise that had belonged to Gilles, the Vernons' servant...The banker did not know what was in it; no doubt some money, perhaps jewels as well as papers. He must make an inventory of them and seal the property up until he could hand it over to M. de Vernon.

But now his business was to appease M. Bernard and get rid of him. Get rid of him—the phrase had come into M. de Saint-Alde's mind without his being aware of it. He did not want to admit that his regard for the young mars was tainted with suspicion. No, all that M. Bernard had said was just and reasonable; yet M. de Saint-Alde would not be sorry, now that he was in a friendly city, among honest people, to see the last of the slightly mysterious stranger.

He asked him, civilly but somewhat coldly, what were his immediate needs until he could present his credentials and obtain funds.

M. Bernard asked for fifty louis d'or and M. de Saint-Alde counted this sum out, thinking to himself that there were fifty louis d'or less in their entire fortune...and that when this gold came to an end—he did not like to pursue the thought. Of course, by then they would have left Hamburg and be in Plymouth. He wondered what the fares to Plymouth would be, wondered what connections he could establish in Hamburg, if after all he would find friends and acquaintances there.

He shut his mind away from these thoughts. His plump, well-cared-for hands did the unusual work of unstrapping the valise and counting out the rouleaux of gold louis d'or.

He again gave formal thanks to M. Bernard for all his services and wished him luck on his mission.

The young man bowed very courteously and took his leave, without any comment on the future or expressing any hope that he would meet M. de Saint-Alde again.

The banker, to his own surprise, distinctly felt a weight lifted from his heart. 'That poor old Breton—servants are always superstitious—has poisoned me against the young man,' he thought. And then he put the whole incident out of his mind, for his cares were immediate and pressing. The welfare and future, the safety and dignity of the two girls, and how to break to Vivienne de Vernon the news of the death of Gilles, and her own isolation from her parents; together with the difficulty and perhaps the impossibility of communicating either with. Brittany or with Plymouth.

He felt now acutely his lack of practical knowledge of the small, necessary details of life—secretaries, stewards, valets, all manner of servants always arranged these things for him. He did not know, for instance, what would be a reasonable charge for the keep for the three of them in a place like this. The first thing would be to find out a bank and get the French gold changed into German currency. No, the first thing was to see that the money itself was safe. There was a large press in his room, big enough to hide two or three human beings, and into this he put his valises, then emptied all the gold into one, locked that, locked the press and put the key into his pocket. Even then, should the least suspicion that he had so much money with him leak out, it was possible for him to be robbed, no doubt murdered too. The place seemed pleasant and honest enough, but there must be bandits about here as in any

other country. It was a posting-station also, which meant that the mail coaches would be coming and going, passenger coaches, too, no doubt. That beer-garden would be a meeting-place for the riff-raff of the town...

M. de Saint-Alde looked at himself in the mirror that hung above the toilet-table, and he was amused despite his poignant distress—for he was a man with a delicate humour—at his own appearance. He would scarcely have recognized that flabby face streaked with sweat and dust, the hair in which pomade and grease stuck in ugly patches, the soiled cravat badly knotted, the salmon-coloured satin waistcoat stained and creased, the plum-coloured coat that seemed suddenly to have become wrinkled and ill-fitting. Never before in his life had he gone so long without his clothes being attended to. He had thought before he left Paris of buying himself a republican outfit, trousers and a tailed coat, but there had not been time. Now he would have to buy suitable attire—that was another expense.

The girls, too, what had they with them? Very little, probably. He smiled again to think how he was daunted by these small problems—he, the man who had dealt with high finance, given loans to exiled Royalty and bribed a whole Convention.

He took out his case of pistols and opened it, looking keenly at the weapons. They were handsome, of ebony and mother-of-pearl, engraved with his coat-of-arms and his marquis's coronet. Then he closed it up—the weapons were too rich, they might excite envy. He unlocked the press again and added the case of pistols to the valise full of gold. His movements were full of caution.

Life was not going to be worth living like this, always suspicious, alarmed. He must buy a plain weapon for his ordinary protection—that would mean another outlay of money. His sword, too, he had kept with him; it was a dress weapon, also rich, worth a good deal, no doubt. And again his arms were engraved on both the blade and scabbard. Should he wear it about Hamburg, would it be conspicuous? He ended by hanging it up in the cupboard on one of the pegs for cloaks. He would buy a plain sword as well as a plain pistol.

When he unpacked his case of toilet articles in gold and ivory, also with his crest, he was struck as he had never been before by their costly look. In his Paris hôtel they had seemed just part of the furniture, in this room they seemed out of place. They, too, were locked away.

He had some jewellery, opals and emeralds—a great deal had been left behind, but something had been brought with him. These, too, he looked at and they also were locked away.

There was a large fortune now in the press; he had to find an excuse for never opening it when the chambermaid was about. After all, perhaps these people were simple and honest, but he must soon move with his treasure and the two girls. They must hire a house somewhere, but what of servants? Some stupid peasant woman, perhaps, would come in and work for them.

Ah, God, what problems! Never before had he been faced with such difficulties!

He made what order his unaccustomed fingers could achieve in his person, cleaned away the dust and sweat of the voyage and went downstairs to interview his host or hostess and make arrangements for his stay.

He had reached the large public parlour and the smiling German woman had approached him and dropped her curtsy before he remembered he could hardly speak a word of her language.

He tried to tell her that he wanted an interpreter, but she could not understand.

'I must go into the city,' he thought, 'and see what I can find. There must be a large number of people there who speak French, many to whom my name is known. I must buy that sword, too, and plainer clothes.'

But he did not want to leave the two girls alone, honest and reliable as these people seemed. The thought tormented him that he might return to find his charges spirited away. He had lost all confidence in any kind of destiny.

At a loss, he passed out under the rusty vine and sat down at one of the tables, trying to think out his problem, hoping that someone might come along who could speak French. He wished that he had learned German. He was so delighted when they had intended to fly to Plymouth because his knowledge of English, scanty as it was, would have been invaluable. This question of the German language he felt to be hopeless.

The woman, seeing him at the table, came along with the beer that she placed before him, and small honey-cakes. He smiled, not wishing to lose her goodwill. He loathed beer and had never tasted honey-cakes. He leaned back in the hardwood chair with a sigh and saw, moving along between the empty tables, for this was not an hour in which the Germans took their leisure, the slender, upright figure, the green coat with many capes of M. Bernard.

He felt relieved, although he had been glad to see the back of the fellow only a few hours before.

M. Bernard approached him and said:

"I am staying at this house, too. I don't know the city and this place seemed as good as another."

"No doubt," replied M. de Saint-Alde. "The trouble is that one can't make oneself understood. You don't know German either, do you?"

"I have a fair knowledge of it," replied M. Bernard.

"But just now at the quay you didn't speak a word!"

"Oh, I thought I should be putting myself forward. I saw you were suspicious of me. I didn't wish to increase your doubts. You might have thought I was misinterpreting."

M. de Saint-Alde laughed.

"My dear fellow, if you interpret for me now, I shall be even more grateful than I am already."

"Oh, I know quite enough German to run along with."

M. Bernard, smiling, sat down opposite the banker, drew the beer towards him and began to eat the honey-cakes.

"I perceive that you do not like this coarse fare. Leave everything in my hands. You shall see that I know my way about."

Part II

1829

"Mother, why are you always so sad when you return from France? Is it that you feel your home is really there and not here with us?"

Lady Sherlock gave her daughter a long, tender, thoughtful look as she replied:

"That is a strange question for you to ask me, my dear. Yet I suppose it is my fault. I have always taught you to be very candid with me."

"Yes, I know," replied the girl gravely; "it is not the sort of question I ought to ask, nor one to which I can expect a reply. But, Mother, the truth is I cannot endure to see you sad."

"I am not sad, Jenny. You regard me too keenly."

"Mother, I love you too much," replied the girl; she looked down at the short sweet grass on which she sat; her small fingers moved restlessly through it. "I can't endure, we none of us could endure, that you shouldn't be quite happy."

"But of course I'm happy." Lady Sherlock spoke with a light yet definite emphasis. "Don't torment yourself, child, and me too. How could I be otherwise but happy here with your father and yourself and Fanny?"

"You put me off," protested Jenny in a still graver tone. "One of these days I'm determined to know all about it."

She looked up as she spoke, and was alarmed, ashamed to see the expression that passed over her mother's face, a spasm that contorted the delicate features. Was it fear or anger?

"Oh, Mother!" exclaimed Jenny, frightened suddenly and clasping the hand that Lady Sherlock dropped at her side. But the elder woman's recovery was instantaneous.

"Why, Jenny, child, you are too romantic! You make something of nothing. Don't let's talk of it, I beg you." But even as she spoke Lady Sherlock knew that she had made a tactical mistake. She was well aware that candour was the best guard for a secret, that she had hidden something away where it might fester and breed disease, instead of bringing it into the light to laugh at it. But her spirits had been low and her ingenuity and energy were not equal to allaying and making light of her daughter's doubts and fears. She continued, in a cheerful tone that she felt herself rang false:

"Why should anything alarm us here, Jenny? We are so happy, so secure. Not a shadow could fall over us here at dear Sherlock."

Jenny smiled sadly, knowing that her mother was putting her off; her mother realized that she knew it. And a silence that was not without a chill fell upon the two women.

Miss Sherlock's name was Geneviève, shortened by her English, father to the English Jenny in the Same way that the name of her younger sister, Françoise, had been altered to Fanny; the youngest child, a boy named Robert after his uncle, the Marquis de Vernon, was Bobby to his parents.

Lady Sherlock, whose nature was indolent and passive at least superficially, had gladly acquiesced in this losing of her own nationality, almost her own identity, in those of her husband. She had allowed her children to be brought up as English children, and it was not very often that she returned to her home in Brittany where her younger brother, the present Marquis de Vernon, lived with his wife and family in the château where she had been born and bred until she was twelve years of age. It was all so long ago, she would say vaguely, whenever she could not avoid talking of her childhood.

She was not yet fifty, and she still retained what had always been her greatest beauty—the grace and charm of her movements, the dignity of the poise of her head, her superb carriage, and her air of smiling gentleness, a

sweet and patrician charm that made it impossible to associate her with anything gross, vulgar or violent.

She was deeply respected by all with whom she came in close contact, and admired by all who met her. It would indeed have been impossible to dislike or even ignore such a persuasive and gentle charm, combined with such intelligence, modesty and spirituality.

She had not been, by the standards of her own country, very young when she had married Sir Robert Sherlock; she was twenty-six years of age, and Jenny, the eldest, was but eighteen years old, and Bobby, the youngest, but ten years; Lady Sherlock had so preserved the essentials of youth—sensitiveness and grace—that she seemed often more like the sister than the mother of the family that had come rather late in her life.

Jenny, too, was slender and long-limbed and had hair the colour of new cedarwood. This golden-pink lustre had faded from Lady Sherlock's tresses, which were now a delicate silver. But Jenny's hair was so blonde that sometimes it looked silver too. The exquisite, precise features were the same, the large clear dark-blue eyes shaded by the golden lashes and brows—an uncommon type of beauty but one always much admired.

Jenny and her mother had always been very close together. As a child, Jenny had developed such a passionate devotion to Lady Sherlock that she had never been allowed to be separated from her for more than a few hours, for it was feared that her mind and perhaps her life might be affected by a long separation from her mother. For this reason she had not been sent to a pension, but had been educated at Sherlock Hall under the care of governesses and tutors. Despite, or perhaps because of, this intensive education, she was unusually accomplished for her age and was too serious for her years.

On her part, Lady Sherlock shared all her interests and activities with her daughter—except one.

This was the charity she dispensed in London. When the girl had been very young Lady Sherlock had directed this work from her Hampshire home, now she kept it apart altogether.

When it was possible to leave Jenny for a few days, or even weeks, without distressing scenes, Lady Sherlock had gone to London now and then to administer personally the charities on which she spent the greater part of her private fortune.

A handsome patrimony had come to her on the death of her father some years before. She had been, too, quite well dowered, and Sir Robert was a wealthy man pleased to leave his wife's fortune in her own hands, since his children were well provided for out of his own handsome estate.

Lady Sherlock had always refused to allow Jenny to share in these charitable activities. She declared that it was depressing for a young girl to be brought into contact with sorrow, grief, and other matters that were grim and tragic. Jenny had always wanted to help, and grieved and brooded over it. Now on this beautiful sunny afternoon in late May, the puzzle of her mother's reserve returned her mind, and with it the faint, yet definitely uneasy wonder why her mother, when she went to visit her brother, M. de Vernon, always returned with a cloud over her usually placid nature.

This distressing uneasiness put a shadow between them, and the girl could scarcely endure it. Her feelings became too strong for her discretion, and although she knew she was making a mistake she could not avoid saying:

"Mother, I'm old enough now for you to tell me everything. You might let me help you more."

"Help me!" said Lady Sherlock, with a startled air. "What do you mean, Jenny?"

"I mean that work you do, the charity, the Homes—you won't even let me know the names of them—that you work for in London."

"Jenny," interrupted Lady Sherlock, with quick sternness, "please don't speak of it any more. Charity is such an ugly word. I do what I can to help those who are wretched. It isn't much. Please, Jenny, don't speak of it again."

But Jenny was bold as well as tender and ardently affectionate.

"Father would like me to help you."

"Your father would like you to help me!" exclaimed Lady Sherlock, in real astonishment.

Jenny could not help laughing.

"Why are you so surprised, Mother? He did not exactly say that he would like me to help you, but he said that you did too much by yourself."

"Ah, that's a very different thing." Lady Sherlock looked relieved. "Your father is quite pleased to let me have—shall we call it a whim, Jenny?—all to myself. Miss Prescott used to help me with it. But now I can manage quite alone."

"But it takes you away, Mother; you go up to London too often."

Lady Sherlock rose in silence from her chair, and Jenny, too, sprang lightly from the grass.

"Very well, Mother, I won't torment you about it again. And I hope the next time you go to France you will take me too."

"Why, of course, Jenny, whenever you wish. Your uncle is always so happy to see you. But you have been once, twice—"

"Yes, once, twice," mocked Jenny gaily, "but I should like to go every time. You go at least every spring. Mother, would you like to stay there in Brittany always?"

"Jenny, what a tease you are today! Of course I should not like to stay there always. This is my home, with you all, and my good neighbours, with your Francis, too, Jenny."

The girl clasped her hands on her mother's arms.

"You know, Mother, I am going to marry Francis only because of you. You said it would please you."

"It's right for you, Jenny, he loves you very much. He is the kind of man who will make you happy."

A look of doubt slightly shadowed Jenny's face.

"I suppose so. He has all the graces and all the virtues and I should be proud."

"Yes, Jenny, and you should marry him soon. There's no sense in waiting. If he is appointed abroad, too, it might mean a long separation."

"Well, I could endure it. I'm quite happy here with you. But now the talk has turned from your affairs to mine, Mother, and that's not fair."

"Let's not talk of either, it's all nonsense," said Lady Sherlock firmly. "Come and feed the swans, Jenny, or have you lost the bread?"

"No, I have it here." The girl swung the chipped straw hat she had been holding in her lap when she sat down on the grass; it was half full of daisies and half full of morsels of bread for the swans.

The two women walked thoughtfully down the long avenue of leafy limes where the trees cast shadows on the smooth, lush grass and raised clusters of leaves filled with sunshine against the transparent blue of the sky in which a few white clouds curled.

It would have been no courtly exaggeration to say that they looked like two dryads in fashionable clothes as they walked along with their arms linked, in and out of those intermingled shafts of light and blurred shade that were all shot with gold. They were almost the same height and had the same slenderness. Both wore white muslin with long blue sashes, only over Lady Sherlock's silver hair was a snood of lace knotted under the chin and round her neck was a double row of pearls, an ornament given her on her wedding day by her father, which she always wore. Jenny's lovely hair, so exquisite of hue in this changing light, was uncovered and fell in thick, smooth curls on to her narrow shoulders. She swung her hat idly in her free hand and there was a serious look on her small, exquisite face. She was a girl of profound feeling, of much courage, one whose character had not yet been tested; she did not know her own inner strength, her own potentialities.

Now into her confused sadness came the shadow of a sense of a divided loyalty.

Francis Quarry was to her a friend, lover, the man whom she had promised to marry. She regarded him with respect and affection and, she supposed, would in time love him, but she believed that unless her mother had been so piteously eager for the match she would not have consented, or at least so soon. And though she would not admit it to herself, for it would have seemed an absurdity, she had no romantic feeling towards the comely young man to whom she was promised as a wife, though she was not averse either to him or to the idea of marriage. It was her mother's anxious joy in the arrangement that moved her most; and then, she had no good reason to oppose it.

Besides the urgings of her common sense, the fact that Frank's estate marched with her father's was a great inducement, and when she was mistress of Quarry Hall she would be a near neighbour to her parents in Sherlock Manor House; but for all that, she did not wish to be married yet, and Sir Francis, who had truly and long desired her for many reasons, did not press her, but was content to wait, confident of her fidelity and, as he hoped, her ripening love.

But when they reached the lake where the swans were moving slowly among the reeds and the white-flowering cresses that starred the verge, all outward signs of trouble or displeasure had left Jenny's smooth young countenance and she looked like a child as she knelt at the edge of the water and threw, daintily mingled together, daisies, white tipped with red, and small pieces of bread, golden crumbs and white crumbs, on to the water. The flowers floated slowly on the placid surface as the swans gobbled the food.

Lady Sherlock unfurled the yellow parasol she carried and put it across her shoulder, holding the ivory handle with languid fingers. The sun, streaming through the yellow silk, gave a glow to her white hair and pale face, illuminating her with a likeness of her lost youth.

Jenny, reflective and thoughtful far beyond her age, mused: 'I suppose' I am afraid of happiness. Everything here has been too perfect for too long. It must always be so, nothing must happen to us, nothing—no quarrels, no illness, no sadness. I love them all—Father, Mother, my sisters and my brother, and they all love me. Everyone we meet is kind and pleasant, I've never heard of any

trouble touching any of us. I suppose that's why I'm afraid, like the man in the fable, who threw his ring into the sea that he might have one misfortune, and then it was brought back by the fish.'

Jenny did not put these thoughts thus clearly into words, but they did pass through her mind. She wished that Francis had not entered politics, that he was not a diplomat. Her father had been pleased about that, he said the young man had 'a sound, successful career before him.' Jenny did not wish to share such fortunes. She wished to remain at Sherlock Manor House all her days.

She was too young herself to understand, or even to wonder at, the wistful quality of her love for her mother. She often felt as if she were the elder of the two, as if she wished to protect the remote and gracious lady from the possible shadow of any misfortune. She supposed sometimes that the shadow of her mother's childhood had fallen over her own, slightly dimming the radiance of her happiness.

Was that so? She wondered now. She knew that her mother, when she had been but twelve years of age, had to fly a fugitive to Hamburg, where she had lived for several years—Jenny did not know how many—in exile and in poverty, at least what was poverty compared with her former security and comfort.

Jenny knew that her mother had taken this flight on a German Ship with an old servant who had died on the voyage, that she had been protected and looked after by another fugitive and his daughter—a banker by the name of M. de Saint-Alde, and that her father, Jenny's grandfather, M. de Vernon, had been arrested soon after her flight.

Because of that and other misfortunes, never clearly defined to Jenny, a long time had gone by before Vivienne de Vernon had been fetched by a lady of her family from Hamburg and brought back to the Breton château.

The adventure, such as Jenny had heard of it, had not been very perilous, indeed it was one that perhaps some girls would have enjoyed. It had a spice of romance and adventure about it, and it had, above all, a happy ending. For when Vivienne de Vernon had returned to Brittany she had found her mother and father well, restored to their estates, and the baby, whose birth had been the cause of the delay in her parents' flight from France, lusty and flourishing.

But Jenny's sensitiveness towards everything that concerned her mother made her realize that perhaps the adventure had not been so pleasant after all. Perhaps those days of anxiety, of separation from all whom she loved, had frightened her so profoundly that even all the years of peace and happiness, exceptional peace, unusual happiness, that had followed had not been able to efface secret fears.

Lady Sherlock was always very reticent in speaking about this episode of the Revolution, but then Jenny did not make much of that, for her mother did not like to talk of herself at all. She had a way of throwing herself with grace and bright eagerness into other people's concerns and of effacing her own. "It was nothing," she would say on the occasions when she could not avoid some mention of her childish adventure. "Think what other people endured in those terrible times! Why, I was lucky, safe, protected the whole while. It was dull and drab in Hamburg, nothing more."

When she was a child Jenny had been satisfied with these assurances, but now—what was the matter with her today that she kept turning it over in her mind? Why was she wondering if her mother had been quite candid? Had the life in Hamburg been so uneventful? Perhaps she had suffered greatly, perhaps

the poverty had been real...She might even have been short of food, poor, delicate mother.

Jenny looked up and her bright eyes were touched with tears. She had not thought that her mother was observing her emotion, but now she heard the beloved voice saying, very cool and tender:

"Jenny, you must not think about me so much. Sometimes I believe you are too fond of me."

Lady Sherlock kissed her daughter as she spoke, but gazed at the swans which were slowly sorting the bread from the drifting daises as Jenny threw the handfuls of crumbs and flowerets from where she sat.

"You think I am foolish—sentimental, perhaps, Mother. I don't know, I can't excuse myself. I feel a kind of cloud over me today, a premonition. But there, I shouldn't have said that, it will make you unhappy."

"Perhaps," said Lady Sherlock, who was always exquisitely in tune with her daughter's mood, "you feel the peace too great, overpowering, sweet and heavy like some over-rich perfume. Sometimes, Jenny, I feel it like that myself. I'm going back to the house now. The strong sun seems to be giving me a headache. No, don't follow me."

Jenny knew when to obey; she did not even look round at her mother as Lady Sherlock walked back to the house.

The fair, breathless day was clouded over with a purplish vapour, thunder was approaching from the left.

Lady Sherlock stood at her window and looked out on the grounds still gilded by a rich sunlight. She could see her daughter's white frock, her rosy-coloured, heavy-fringed parasol moving along the glades, with the tall figure of Sir Francis Quarry beside her. They were talking together eagerly, Lady Sherlock thought. She hoped that the young man was trying to persuade the girl to consent to the marriage in October. Just because she loved Jenny so much she wanted her to get away before...

Lady Sherlock checked her thoughts. Before what? She stood slightly rigid at the window; there were other familiar figures in sight, all moving slowly as if under a charm, the charm of a hot summer day that was going to end in thunder, darkness, storms, a drench of cold rain.

At present the stillness was an enchantment. There were Mr. West and Bobby and there were Miss Prescott and Fanny, the child with her shuttlecock and battledore, Miss Prescott with her books in a deep satchel.

Lady Sherlock liked, almost loved these people, without ever in any way having been intimate with them. She admired the dry tutor—a modest, humble-minded man beneath his scholastic affectations; she would be sorry when Bobby went to Eton, if only for the reason that it would mean that Mr. West would leave the household into which he had fitted so admirably.

Miss Prescott, too, was a good, honest woman, so grateful for little kindnesses. Lady Sherlock had warm, if remote, feelings for everyone in her large household, from old Tabby, who had been Sir Robert's nurse and was now aged upwards of ninety years, down to the youngest scullery-maid or boot-boy. Indeed, Lady Sherlock's kindness, her tenderness, were excessive; they had a poignant quality as if she owed something to humanity and was over-anxious to pay the debt; yet she was not intimate with anyone save Jenny, and even there she had reserves.

Now she felt languid, conscious of the silence of the house in the summer afternoon. When her daughter was out of sight, Lady Sherlock withdrew from the window and sank on to the chaise-longue at the end of her bed.

She had a headache—from the thunder, of course; but these headaches were coming too frequently. They were desperately like boredom, ennui in her own language. She fought against this, regarding it as a crime. She had no reason, she told herself passionately, to find life dull. It was true that Sir Robert was often away; he was in Winton this afternoon. As a justice of the peace, a governor of the great school, a conscientious landlord, an active sportsman, his time was always full; yet he paid her more attention than did the husbands of most of the Englishwomen she knew, and it was not his absences that oppressed her. She often felt this sense of weariness, of restlessness, of excited fatigue even when her husband was near her, talking to her, trying to interest her in his pursuits. Even—and this seemed to her warm, sensitive heart like blasphemy—she would have this sensation of uneasiness when she was with Bobby or Fanny, though never when with Jenny. There was something frightening in the affinity she had with Jenny.

She was restless; she went out of the house again and stood at a loss in the garden.

What was the matter with her? "I am a discontented, unhappy woman," she said aloud, and then was frightened at the sound of her own accents, speaking French in her English home.

Of course, that was not true. That also was a blasphemy. She was ill, it was a migraine, the thunder coming up, the last few days had been oppressively hot. She ought to be happy in her chosen home, where she was safe and protected.

This home was a house that had been rebuilt several times to please the differing tastes of succeeding generations of English gentlemen.

Now it stood, of red brick with a white portico of classic pillars, stately and handsome with a sweep of gravel drive in front and a lawn divided from it by short white posts linked by chains. Against the purplish colour of the brick showed a few red roses carefully trained in a delicate tracery beneath the lower windows.

Lady Sherlock glanced keenly at the house. She liked the place, perhaps more—though she had never confessed as much to herself—than she liked its master. She had never analyzed her feeling for her husband, whom she allowed herself to respect in a drowsy fashion, touched by irony; she left her relationship with him at that, even in the privacy of her thoughts.

He had wooed her for three years and only the pressure of her parents had induced her at last to accept him...perhaps only her pressure was inducing Jenny to accept Sir Francis Quarry...curious, she thought, how life went round in patterns, spirals, circles.

'I don't care so much what the others do, but I want to save Jenny,' she thought. She seemed to droop, like a lily out of water, as she stood looking at the fine house in the blaze of sunshine; doves were cooing in the high elms, behind the roof line, there was a tracery of shade on the grass at her feet, and over her face, so delicately faded, over her silver hair; the glow from the yellow silk parasol that she had brought, with her and opened made her appear young and golden again for a brief while.

She winced from her surroundings, happy as they were. If they had left her alone twenty-five years ago she would have retreated into the convent as she

had wished...Why had they been so against her entreaties? Oblivion had been her passionate desire. They had said she had been attracting attention by her curious whims...In those days it had been a curious whim to wish to go into a convent, not the usual thing as it had been in her mother's and her grandmother's time.

So she had married the most likable of her suitors, the English baronet whom her father had met in Paris—a man not much older than herself, personable, able to offer her security, money...She had married him and become an English lady. And her first two children had died, then there had been Jenny—

She checked her thoughts. 'Why am I going over this, even in my mind?' She did not confess to herself that she often went over it...she had dreamt of this frequently. She would wake up in the night and believe that she was back again in the Breton château, arguing with her father that she did not wish to marry, that she wished to withdraw from the world.

She turned and slowly re-entered the house, which was cool and spacious; green Venetian blinds were drawn against the sun. She went into the drawing-room that she had herself furnished to her own taste, grey and pale-green silk on the walls and on the furniture, ash-coloured wood chairs touched with gilt—all rather like herself, drowsy, remote, like her own personality.

She was surprised to see her husband there in the dim lovely light that seemed as if it were filtered through water. He did not often come to this room where she had her harp and her work-box, her French books. She knew that he was going to say in a rather portentous tone: "My dear, I wish to speak to you."

And to prevent this commonplace, and feeling a little jarred, she asked in her English that had such a pretty accent:

"My dear Robert, what is it you have to say?"

"Oh, it is about this matter of Mrs. Perry," he began at once, a little uneasy, and looking at her with a kind of covert defiance that seemed to say—'I know you're not going to like it, but I'm determined to go on.'

"Oh, Mrs. Perry." Lady Sherlock sank, with her ineffable grace, into one of the satin-covered chairs by the large bowl of late lilies in the window-place. "Why, what has she to do with us, poor thing?"

"You went to see her yesterday, Vivian." He gave a flat, and to her displeasing, accent to her French name. "She is not liked, my dear. She's leaving the village in a day or two, and I pray, I beg you, not to go to see her again."

"Unkind," said Lady Sherlock, not looking at her husband. "Why do you ask me to do an unkind thing? Surely, if I have a position as your wife, it should enable me to be gracious?"

"I know." Sir Robert frowned. "I don't like to speak to you myself. I feel that at the bottom you're right. What you do is womanly, generous. But it is misunderstood, Vivian. Even Frank doesn't like it."

"Sir Francis?" She raised her fine brows. "Is he that kind of man? The man whom Jenny is going to marry!"

"Every man is that kind of man about his own womenfolk, my dear, or the womenfolk of the house into which he is going to marry."

"Mrs. Perry seems a delightful creature.'

"But she's been an actress and she's never been married. She's here under false pretences."

"Although she took the Dower house," protested Lady Sherlock wearily, "she didn't ask us to be friendly with her."

"No, and I suppose many of the ladies only called upon her because they thought it so peculiar her living alone. She did call herself Mrs. Perry and she gave out that she was a widow. It is all lies, and she's—well, not a respectable woman."

"And because of that she has to leave?" asked Lady Sherlock with her passive smile, her lazy grace.

"Why, of course, you couldn't expect anything else. Come, my dear, you know that in France they're even more severe than we are here. It wouldn't be possible in a French village, say at your brother's place, for her to have come at all. Here she has the vicar and the vicar's wife, there she would have the priest and the priest's niece. Your brother and Hélène wouldn't have received her. You've been too easy from the first."

"I liked her," smiled Lady Sherlock drowsily. "She's a woman who's had what you call a hard time, troubles. She seemed to me good in all the things that matter."

"You draw it too fine," answered Sir Robert. The frown on his florid face increased. "I honour you for it, my dear, there are not many women in your position would take such a view. But it's misunderstood, it's taken for easiness, they talk of French lightness. Besides, we've Jenny and Fanny to think of."

"Jenny and Fanny have both been to visit Mrs. Perry. They liked her."

"Yes, that's the devil of it. They mustn't go again. They must be told she's left the village. No fuss, naturally, or scandal might be made. They must just be allowed to forget her."

"It won't be so easy," smiled Lady Sherlock, rising "They found her amusing. She's gentle, she had ways with birds and animals—children like that. I shan't take the children there again. But, Robert, I mean to go and say good-bye this very afternoon."

"It's a mistake," he declared, with as much irritation as he ever showed, for he was an easy; good-natured man who adored his wife, whom he always secretly felt was far too good for him, a pearl of the first lustre, an exquisite creature whom he felt scarcely capable of appreciating...He had spoken the truth, too, when he said he honoured her for her generosity. But now the feelings of his caste were roused.

"I'm afraid, Vivian, that I must forbid you to go."

"Forbid me?" She seemed surprised at the word and glanced at him with gentle amazement.

"Yes. It's the first time I've used that word to you, isn't it?" he said awkwardly. "But I do use it—now. My dear, don't go to see Mrs. Perry. After all, there's a great deal you don't understand. You're too high-minded, you've led too protected and enclosed a life yourself. I should very much dislike to think that you did know the kind of life Mrs. Perry may have led."

"No, I suppose I can't understand," she said, looking down at the pale carpet. "But I do understand that she is not married, that she lived with a man and said she was his wife."

"Yes." Sir Robert's awkwardness increased.

"You see, my dear," continued the lady gently, "I know something, from my Fulham Charity. You know what it is. It tries to help women like Mrs. Perry, but who have even less money, even fewer friends."

"Yes, a Magdalene Charity, as people call them; and I'm glad you've mentioned it, my dear, for it brings me to a point I've wanted to raise for some while. Now that Jenny and Fanny are older I wish you'd give up this work. I don't quite know how they got round you—the bishop, I mean, and his wife, and the people who conduct the business."

"You're speaking very awkwardly, Robert. Need there be so much difficulty between us? What I'm helping is a home for women who've lost their characters, women who can't get work because their past is against them, women who have illegitimate children. We try to do what we can for them, to give them back their pride, their dignity. It is not so easy, believe me, Robert, it is not so easy. I go and see these poor women myself."

"That's what I don't like," he broke in irritably.

"But other women do it—ladies, whose husbands are in the same position you are yourself, Robert." She looked at him anxiously. "Pray don't forbid me this. You ask what made me think of it?" she added hastily. "In Brittany—the nuns, you know; they have a home for women of this kind, and I became interested in it. I understood all their suffering."

"No need to explain yourself to me, my dear," he said shamefacedly. "I feel a brute to have spoken to you at all. But I'm thinking of Jenny and Fanny. They need never know about it."

"Jenny knows about it—my charity, as she calls it, though I dislike the word."

Lady Sherlock could not long think of herself, she must always be thinking of the other person's point of view, and now she looked with an almost remorseful tenderness at her husband...After all, he mattered more to her than did poor Martha Perry who had disturbed so transiently the tranquillity and dignity of this small society into which she had intruded the shadow of her misery and shame; it would not matter very much to her if Lady Sherlock visited her once more or not, but it might matter very much to Robert—she must consider his caste, his code, his point of view.

"My dear," she said quickly, "I won't go near Mrs. Perry again if that will please you."

Her foreign accent, almost imperceptible when she was undisturbed, became stronger in her agitation. "It was only that I meant to be kind—you know, what you would say, sympathetic, is it not? And as to my work, what I do in London, it is only a home for poor women we have—the Fulham Home we call it, just that and nothing more."

"My dear! Pray! Don't, you are disturbing yourself, you must not do that!" The big man turned quickly, took her by the shoulders. "Vivian! You are agitated, you look quite pale! Distressed! I wish I had not spoken! You shall go and see Mrs. Perry if you wish."

"No! Remember she is not even Mrs. Perry. She must not be thought of...I must consider you and the girls."

"There's another thing, Vivian, I want to ask you—perhaps this is the moment." Sir Robert's emotions were not easily roused, but they lay deep. "It's about your faith, my dear. If you would care—I wouldn't mind—a priest, even here—"

"No. I lost my faith in the Revolution. No, yet I like the nuns—I'm very pleased to be what I became when I married you, Robert. Don't speak of it again."

He cursed his clumsiness. He seemed to have distressed her more, instead of pleasing her as he had hoped to do. It had often hung in his mind that perhaps she had regretted adopting the Protestant faith. He had wished his children to belong to the Church of England and she had acquiesced, perhaps too meekly. Well, that was no fault in her, charm ing lovely Vivienne...Let her have her Home; he knew that it was run under strict supervision by a bishop, by a bishop's lady and a stern matron, and philanthropic gentlefolk...It was a ridiculous squeamishness on his part that disliked his wife's name being associated, even in patronage, with what he termed to himself the sordid side of life. But let that matter go now; he had got his way in the matter of the unfortunate woman, Martha Perry.

Lady Sherlock raised her frail face, which yet had a look of strength and kissed him quietly, then moved away from the tender touch of his hand.

"You know," she said irrelevantly, "I think I like Martha Perry because she never spoke to me about the past. People are too fond of talking about the Revolution, our wretched miseries. You know," she laughed suddenly, "anyone who has been in the Revolution, even one who has had poor little adventures such as I had—nothing at all—they are objects of curiosity. People want to talk about it."

"I know, I know," agreed Sir Robert sympathetically. "I always try to prevent anything of that kind—impertinent curiosity. It's over, too," he added comfortably, "all in the past. But I suppose sometimes you think of your two friends—M. de Saint-Alde and his daughter? The daughter died, too, didn't she?"

"I don't want to speak of Estienne. Robert, how could you say that, just after I'd told you I didn't like people talking of it?"

This seemed to the good baronet over-sensitiveness on his wife's part, and he smiled indulgently. He had always understood that M. de Saint-Alde and his daughter had died of typhus in Hamburg...it was remarkable how his Vivienne had escaped. It must have been tragic enough for the poor child, alone there, so far from her friends and relatives. But he understood that good women had looked after her and that she had had every care and attention. And although she must have been much grieved by the death of her kind friends, she had not known them very long. The Saint-Aldes were not known to the de Vernons, it had been a mere acquaintanceship born of misfortune—surely it might be spoken of now? But he was very willing to humour her.

"I'm a blunt fool." He smiled kindly. "We certainly won't talk of it again. What shall we talk of? Frank and Jenny, eh? He wants the marriage to be in October, you know."

"I do, too," said Lady Sherlock, turning earnestly. "Jenny is almost too much attached to Sherlock and to us. Her affection has something poignant in it."

"Why, it's natural enough for a young girl to be attached to her home," said the matter-of-fact Sir Robert.

"But it will make leaving it very distressing for her."

"Well, all girls are sorry when they get married and leave their parents. But Jenny's home will be only next door to ours."

"But what if Frank goes abroad? He talked about getting the Residency in Dresden."

"Well, I don't know about that. You can't expect a fellow to put a spoke in his career because his wife doesn't want to leave her mother." Sir Robert's smile was kindly, but firm.

"This is one of my foolish days," sighed Lady Sherlock. "You are thinking that I am, as you call it, a complete idiot. Now I will go upstairs. I came in really because I had a headache; then I found you here, and you began talking of Mrs. Perry and my poor girls."

"One word more, although it's an uncomfortable subject," said Robert, opening the door for his wife. "Don't fake it ill, my dear."

"I couldn't take anything ill from you, Robert. I know your good heart and your love for me."

She used the word "love" rather freely, her husband always thought, and made him feel a little embarrassed. But then, she was a Frenchwoman and her values were slightly different from his; in some ways they were strangers.

"I don't want Jenny, or Fanny, when she's a little older, brought into your work. I understand what it means to you, and that it's rather on the French pattern, copied from the nuns of France. But I think it's for older women, women even older than you are, Vivian. You're still too young and lovely for that kind of thing, and as for Jenny—"

"You need not say another word, Robert. I should not think of it. I'll gradually drop all mention of the Fulham Home, Jenny won't know a word about it. Believe me, I owe you that, Robert. Perhaps I can stop it myself. But no, why should it be right for other women and not for me?"

He could not explain. He kissed her in silence.

But she insisted:

"Robert, tell me. Why right for other women and wrong for me?"

"Oh, I don't know. I suppose I think it might be left to—well, you know, Vivienne—the dowdy, hatchet faced creatures."

"Can't one be pretty and virtuous?" She mocked him and left him quickly.

He could not put into words what he meant. To him, at least, she was enchanting, lovely; he did not wish her sullied by any approach to the poor drabs to whom she devoted most of her fortune and far too much of time. Of course, he knew most people admired this trait in her. She always had a train of clergy and matrons given to good work. It was a curious and, her husband thought, rather objectionable contrast to her dainty loveliness, which seemed to him associated with courts and all that was frivolous and gay.

He arrived, though by a far different way, at the conclusion to which Jenny had come—that Lady Sherlock was always rather sad and disturbed after her visits to Brittany, and he wondered, as Jenny had wondered, if Vivienne were homesick.

'This isn't her country after all,' he thought. 'She's had twenty-five years of it and I dare say feels a stranger, even sometimes to me and the children.'

He liked his French relatives—M. de Vernon and his charming wife, Hélène, and their young family, eager, active people, cultured and enthusiastic. He liked the place they had, the beautifully kept château, the whole estate. But he did feel alien when he went there, which was rarely, and he supposed that Vivienne might feel alien still at Sherlock.

M. de Vernon had never been able to tell his brother-in-law anything of Vivienne's adventures in Hamburg, for he had been born a few days after she set sail in the SACHSEN with Gilles, the servant who had been in charge of her,

and all he knew of those days had been what he had heard from his father and mother and Vivienne herself, and this was not very much.

Vivienne had always been considered by the Vernon family extremely lucky to have been in the German city during the worst part of the Revolution, when her mother and father and infant brother had been in La Force, expecting every day to be sent to the guillotine. All that horror she had been spared, and though she had felt the separation from her family acutely, it was always understood that, at least as long as M. de Saint-Alde and his daughter lived, she had been comparatively happy as well as comparatively safe in Hamburg.

Estienne was very seldom mentioned by Lady Sherlock. Her husband had learned from M. de Vernon that she had been greatly attached to the girl, who had, as far as was known, died in her arms...The subject had been so painful that no one spoke of it. The family of Saint-Alde was extinct, too.

There were a number of things Lady Sherlock could do. Many activities lay to her hand. She could join her daughter whom she saw with Sir Francis in the garden, and add her persuasions to those of the young man for the October wedding. She could join the children, the governess and the tutor—many agreeable afternoons had she spent in that fashion. They were cultured people and spoke French, both of them, and she liked to talk her native language as often as possible.

There was the still-room she could visit; she liked to make jellies and preserves and herb tea after her mother's recipes.

A pleasant carriage drive, and the carriage was always at her disposal, would bring her to the houses of amiable neighbours—not people, perhaps, with whom she had ever been or ever could be intimate, but people of her own class, courteous and charming.

But no, she must lie here moping on her couch, her mind darting from one small agitation, one trifling anxiety, to another. There were visits to the dressmaker to be paid, a choice of colour to be made for a ribbon or a flounce, decisions to be taken as to a' London and a Paris visit. Letters to write to her brother and Hélène, his wife. Another visit to be arranged—to the Fulham Home...Such annoyances as these darted in and out of her uneasy mind like fish disturbed in a standing pool.

What had disturbed her? She sat upright. The talk about Mrs. Perry of course, then Sir Robert's objections to her Home, his talk of his daughters, the question of Jenny's approaching marriage.

Oh, this is absurd, they are nothing but butterflies in the air! She forced herself to use this simile, but the expression that had come into her mind was 'poisonous flies.'

What should she do—remain in her room or walk abroad in the garden? She liked the gardens, the parterres filled with flowers, recurrent circles of glory, from the pale wistful blooms of early spring to the dark, luxuriant blossoms of late autumn. She liked the quincunxes, the fish pools, the decoy ponds—though while she was mistress of Sherlock no wild fowl was allowed to be netted there—the walks, the sloping fields where the deer browsed...

But today all was under a cloud. It must be the approaching thunder.

As she had gazed out of-the window from which with a hasty hand she had drawn aside the holland blind she had thought she saw a slight darkness passing over the landscape as if the sun were eclipsed...It must be the gradual approach of the thunder-clouds across the sunny sky.

Lady Sherlock rose and almost against her own volition took a key that hung from a fine gold chain on her bosom and went to the large press in the corner. This was not locked, but she drew from inside it a coffer, placed the key in the lock and as the lid flew back took out at once a small note-book covered in maroon-coloured leather.

She opened this at the first page. There was a pencil and water-colour sketch of a dark, vivacious-eyed girl and underneath was the name Estienne de Saint-Alde, then the date 1794, and the word Hamburg, and her own signature.

Why was she looking at this now? She could remember so well the day when she had drawn it. The little book had been one of the few personal possessions that she had taken with her from Brittany. It was not a quarter filled; after the portrait there were only a few sketches of faces and places, a few lines of sentimental verse. Why had she kept that when she had lost so much else far more precious?

She locked the book up again in the coffer, closed the press and returned to the window.

It was past, what was the use of pretending she had forgotten it? What was the use of manoeuvring conversation so that no one referred to it, making excuses not to talk of it? Excuses were easily found; but it was there, like a sword between herself and happiness.

'That journey to Hamburg,' she said to herself, clenching her hand unconsciously and staring down at the small white knuckles, 'destroyed my life. It prevented me from meeting my true love, perhaps even from having the children I ought to have had. There is something strange about Jenny, and the other two seem to belong more to their father than they do to me.'

She closed her eyes, no longer able to hold back the memory. These sunny days were a terrible delight; they brought to her her childhood, the felicity she had enjoyed until she was twelve years of age—those sunny, silent days in the château. The meals in the room where the windows stood open on the bright courtyard, a fat dog basking on the hot stones, a cat moving slowly along the walls, the sound of a tap turned and the water being splashed in the kitchen, the maids going to and fro, singing, the pond and the chestnut tree in the home fields, the scent of new bread baking, and over all the aroma of love.

With a sigh and an effort the woman of almost fifty thrust away the ghost of the child she had been.

'This is not my place,' she said. 'Can I ever find a spot solitary enough in which to confess it? I am here a stranger and an alien.'

But she would not admit these thoughts and banished them so quickly that they did not seem to have existed. Then with nervous hands she knotted the length of lace she usually wore around her silver hair, and turning and moving quickly went downstairs with a light step that had a gliding quality like that of an unearthly creature down the wide shallow stairs and turned into the garden. She must have company and at once.

By the fishpond she found the familiar and beloved group that was yet not as familiar and beloved as those groups in her memory—the tutor, the governess and the two children; the boy and girl at their games, the woman with her book on her knee preparing tomorrow's tasks, the man peering through his spectacles at the Latin volume he was spending his leisure in translating.

To prevent them from rising, Lady Sherlock at once took her place on the warm stone bench where they were seated.

The children waved their hands at her and laughed and went on with their game, tossing the feathered shuttlecock over the close-clipped hedges of box and hornbeam that in the heat of the sun gave out a pungent odour.

Mr. West, in order to make conversation with the lady with whom he never felt quite at ease, began at once in a casual, respectful tone:

"Oh, Lady Sherlock, you will be interested to know there was a Frenchman in the village this morning."

She appeared interested indeed. She turned her head sharply and gazed at him without speaking. This was news to Miss Prescott also, who, putting aside her work in deference to her mistress's presence, said:

"Oh! Some visitor for Lady Sherlock?"

"No, not a visitor to Lady Sherlock," smiled Mr. West, polishing his thick glasses, "that's the curious part of it. I shouldn't expect a Frenchman to come here unless he had some good reason."

"Unless he had some good reason." repeated Lady Sherlock. She did not seem able to say any more, and Mr. West, slightly wondering at what in another person he would have thought stupidity, said amiably:

"Why, yes. I was down at the 'Sherlock Arms' this morning—you know, Lady Sherlock, I have been lending books to little Timothy there—I think he's going to be quite a scholar one of these days—when they told me about this Frenchman and seemed quite disturbed."

"Why should they be quite disturbed?" asked Lady Sherlock, still never altering her attitude nor lowering her gaze from Mr. West's face.

"Well, I suppose it's such a novelty. Of course, they're used to French people coming up here to the Hall, but this man was different. He seemed of a different class too. Marston wasn't very clear about that."

"It is odd," said Miss Prescott, joining in the conversation, and with a touch of real interest. "What should he want here?"

"Oh, I don't know. Marston said he asked a great number of questions about the Hall, and the Sherlock family and you and me and then he said he was a traveller making notes for a book he was going to write on rural England and the great families."

"Well, I suppose that's it," admitted the governess, rather disappointed that there was not something more romantic or dramatic about the stranger. "I don't see why there was any uneasiness about him, then."

"Well, Marston seemed in an odd way puzzled and disturbed," said Mr. West. He glanced at Lady Sherlock, and she seemed at last aware of what was being said and moved her head and stared down at the grass at her feet.

"He was a strange-looking fellow, by all accounts: a middle-aged man, quite well dressed, good-looking. But, of course, Marston is not much of a hand at description. The fellow came and left on his own horse and paid well for what he had—"

"Why," interrupted Lady Sherlock in a low voice, "did Mr. Marston tell you all this? Why make it of any importance?"

"Well, you know what these people are. Ever since the Revolution and the War they're full of legends and stories about France. I suppose they think, Lady Sherlock, your country's not settled yet, and that all manner of spies, adventurers and scoundrels sent by Bonaparte or the 'Royalists are still wandering all over Europe."

"Perhaps they're not wrong," said Lady Sherlock. "But this man, what can he have to do with us?"

"I don't know in the least. I asked Marston what name he gave and he said Beyrolles—or that is what I made of it."

"Why should Marston have asked his name?" demanded Lady Sherlock.

"Oh, I suppose he asked so many questions himself. You know what these people are. And as I say, Marston doesn't observe very well. Mrs. Marston didn't see him, more's the pity. She'd have given us a better picture of the fellow."

"When did he leave?" asked Lady Sherlock, rising.

"Oh, this morning. He rode away towards the coast. He had come, I think, from Windsor. I hope I haven't disturbed you, Lady Sherlock."

"Why should you disturb me?" she asked, swiftly. "I don't know the name—Beyrolles, I never heard it before. The man can't have anything to do with me or mine." There was a touch almost of ferocity in her tone, and Mr. West, rising also, said:

"Of course, Lady Sherlock. It was stupid of me to mention it, perhaps. I might have known it would bring back unpleasant memories."

He felt this was a tactless remark, for the lady said instantly:

"Why should it bring back unpleasant memories? I am only one of thousands who survived the Revolution and its terrors and the War, too, Mr. West. But now everything is safe, nothing could happen, and the evil is over, there can be no menace anywhere."

She moved quickly away across the grass between the hedges of hornbeam and box towards the house, taking no heed of the children's joyous cries following her.

At this, Miss Prescott said to Mr. West:

"It was rather tactless of you to speak so. You should not have told her that, you know. You should realize how she dislikes to be reminded of the past. She suffered a good deal in Hamburg."

"I really thought she had forgotten that," replied Mr. West, with asperity. "After all, Lady Sherlock's a very fortunate woman and her troubles lasted a very little while. I supposed that by now she had really forgotten them. One would scarcely expect her to be so disturbed by the mere mention of a Frenchman in Sherlock."

"But you said yourself it was a strange business," said Miss 'Prescott severely. "Besides, she never can forget those days she spent in Hamburg. I think," added the governess sagely, "it was the death of her two friends, especially that Estienne de Saint-Alde, you know. I think she died in her arms of typhus."

"Well, well, very sad no doubt." Mr. West took up his books and his glasses. "She seemed rather distracted, sad, I thought, when she, came out here, and I hoped that perhaps the anecdote would amuse her."

"Don't mention it again, pray, Mr. West." The governess took up her pencil and began making notes for the morrow's lessons.

Lady Sherlock went directly to her room, put on a shawl of grey silk over her pale, lavender-coloured dress, and a wide white Leghorn hat with black ribbon. Then, almost mechanically taking up her reticule in which she had her handkerchief, her mittens and a little money, she quickly left the house, went down the drive without being seen, for it was the very height of the afternoon

and no one was working, and turned down the dusty high road towards the village.

She very seldom went abroad on foot and, though so kindhearted and almost timidly anxious to please and so naturally gracious, she had a great dislike of any ostentation of charity or bounty and her alms and her corn-. forts were distributed privately through the housekeeper, Mrs. Rale, or Miss Prescott.

For the same reasons she seldom visited her husband's tenants, although she was always willing to see them at Sherlock Manor House and entertained them there with an almost prodigal lavishness. Sometimes she and the two girls would stroll along the woods and lanes, but she could not remember when she had been out on foot alone before...this and the approaching thunderstorm added a strangeness to her already excited mood. The peasants at the doors of the cottages, leaning on the railings of their little gardens, old men, old women and children, greeted her respectfully as she passed, with a mumbled word from one to the other as to why my lady should be on foot and with a thunderstorm coming on, too.

Lady Sherlock, walking rapidly, reached the 'Sherlock Arms' as the first drops of rain began to patter on the thick leaves of the elm trees by the roadside.

It was a fine old inn with a large archway leading into a courtyard used by the coaches. In front of it hung a board on which in gaudy colours were Sir Robert Sherlock's arms, crest, mantling and motto.

The lady paused for a moment. There was no one in sight; the green door of the inn was closed, the white dimity curtains drawn primly at the windows. She knew the Marstons well: Agatha Marston was employed in the kitchens at Sherlock Hall, and the boy Timothy, delicate and scholarly, was being given, at Sir Robert's desire, a few lessons in the classics by Mr. West.

The rain fell, large drops of moisture darkened the dust here and there in front of the inn door; the drooping stocks and gillyflowers that spread to right and left in the fenced garden began to revive in the rain, almost visibly expanding and throwing off their skeins of dust.

Lady Sherlock knocked at the door, and Mrs. Marston, who had observed her from the window, peeping from under one of the dimity curtains, came hurrying at once, fearful that something had happened to Aggie, but surely my lady would not come on foot with a storm brewing because of poor Aggie? For a while Mrs. Marston could not understand what my lady said. She seemed to be talking, to the good woman's ear, in a foreign language. The villagers had noticed before that, when agitated or fatigued, Lady Sherlock's English would become thick, almost incoherent. So now all that the landlady of the 'Sherlock Arms' could do was to say "Yes, my lady," and "Certainly, my lady," dropping curtsy after curtsy, as she conducted Lady Sherlock into the best parlour and hastily dusted for her a large wheel chair with arms polished from long usage.

Lady Sherlock, having accepted a glass of water, seemed to have regained some of her serenity. She smiled, and said slowly, as if counting her words:

"I was chancing to walk out when I saw the thunder coming and thought I might rest here a little."

Then she asked about Timothy and gave news of Aggie, a good girl, Mrs. Rale said, getting on with her work. Mrs. Marston was still puzzled, there was something unnatural in all this; she felt awkward, uneasy.

Lady Sherlock flung off the thick dove-coloured silk shawl with the heavy fringe and said suddenly:

"Mr. West told me a countryman of mine, a Frenchman, was here today. What was he like?"

"Indeed, ma'am, I didn't see him. My husband served him. I was away over at my mother's house."

"Did nobody see him, nobody but your husband?"

"Why no, my lady, I don't think so, unless it was Timothy, who was curled up in the window-seat with his books, as usual."

"I'll go and see Timothy," said Lady Sherlock, rising. "I can't understand it, a Frenchman coming here and not calling at the Manor House. Perhaps," she added hurriedly, "he was some friend of mine, someone I used to know. He may have been unfortunate—you know what has happened in the last few years in France—he may have come, wishing to see me, and then lost courage."

"We know his name, ma'am," said Mrs. Marston, eager to help. "M. Bayroll, or some such name as that."

"It doesn't mean anything to me," smiled Lady Sherlock. "Where is Timothy?"

"He's in the front room, my lady, in his usual place, with his books. Mr. West says he's getting on finely with his lessons, he'll be a great scholar yet."

Lady Sherlock nodded absently and, preceding the hostess of the 'Sherlock Arms,' went down the small passage and turned into the little front room to the left of the door where Timothy Marston, a sickly boy slightly crippled, spent most of his time in a cushioned window-seat with a table beside him on which were his books, papers, and pens, and a wicker cage containing a tame magpie.

His plain, pasty, pointed face brightened into a touching radiance when he saw the lady, to him so strange and beautiful, entering his room. It was some time since she had visited him, bringing him nectarines and peaches from the Manor House and books in French for him to translate.

"Don't get up, Timothy, don't try to move." Lady Sherlock sat down at once on the chair drawn up by the window-seat. "The rain was coming down heavily and I came here to rest."

Timothy and Mrs. Marston exchanged a glance, almost unconsciously. The rain was not coming down heavily, even now there were only a few sullen drops soaking in the dust.

"You saw this Frenchman today," continued Lady Sherlock, locking her hands in her lap. "Your mother didn't see him and your father didn't take much notice, or so Mr. West said. Could you tell me what he was like?" She thought: 'The sick are always sensitive and the boy has nothing else to do. He will be able to give me a good description.'

But Timothy, although obviously eager to please, had seen the stranger only from the window of his parlour. He described a tall dark man in a dark-green travelling coat, his hair brushed up at the sides, his features rather harsh yet handsome, his eyes bright yet rather too close together. His English was not very fluent, he had had some difficulty in making himself understood. He had made a great number of notes in a small book he carried. His horse was good and he had been careful about the baiting of it. He had stayed several hours, taken two meals paying in English money.

Timothy had not taken much notice of him at first, for he had thought that he was perhaps the outrider for M. de Vernon, who had come twice to Sherlock

and each time had brought with him a retinue of French servants, some of whom had had to be accommodated at the 'Sherlock Arms.'

"No, no," said Lady Sherlock. "No, Timothy, my brother is not coming to visit me, not for a long while yet. He has a young family he can't leave."

Mrs. Marston could no longer restrain her curiosity.

"And who does your ladyship think the foreign gentleman might be?" she asked. "I hope," she added, with the Englishman's profound distrust of all foreigners in general and the French in particular, "that he is not up to some mischief, intending to rob the Manor House if your ladyship and Sir Robert chanced to be away."

"No, I don't think that," said Lady Sherlock. "I suppose he was, as he said, a traveller, and going to write a book about rural England. It's quite possible, quite likely." She rose. "You don't remember any more, do you, Timothy?"

"No, my lady, I'm sorry I don't remember anything more. As I say, I didn't take much notice of him at first, it was only after he had been here some time and I heard him questioning Father. I've learned a little French myself," he added with pride, "and if I'd been able to walk I'd have gone out and helped."

"But he knew a little English?" asked Lady Sherlock.

"Oh yes, my lady. But Father don't know a word of French. There were many questions and answers passed—"

"And all about us, and the place?"

"Yes, my lady, so I think."

Lady Sherlock seemed about to say more, but controlled herself:

"Well, the rain has stopped now, and I'll go home." She opened her reticule, took a guinea out and laid it among Timothy's books. "That's a fee to buy yourself—what was it you wanted?—a dictionary, Latin or Greek?"

She cut across their awkward thanks, and without looking at either of them left the parlour, went down the passage and out into the rain.

"Why, what's her ladyship thinking of today!" exclaimed Mrs. Marston. "First she says she came in here because it was raining heavily when it was but spitting a few drops, and now she says it's stopped, and she goes off into it when it's beginning to fall fast."

She ran out of the inn calling after, the lady who was already turning down the road:

"Won't you let me send a message up to the Manor House for a carriage, my lady? Thunder's coming on, can't you hear it?"

"Yes, I can. I don't know what I must be thinking of. Of course, it's raining, I shall be wet. I'm frightened of thunder, too, when I'm away from the house."

Mrs. Marston shouted for Jim, the ostler, telling him to run up to the Hall and fetch the carriage for her ladyship. But Lady Sherlock did not seem to hear her, at least she took no notice and turned again from the inn door and went quickly up the village street and so back home. It was but twenty minutes' walk and the storm did not break until she was in her room again, taking off her slightly wetted hat and shawl, putting down her reticule.

The thunder sounded suddenly in a clap that seemed to be directly above the house; Lady Sherlock heard voices in the passage—perhaps they were looking for her, wondering where she had gone; how guarded she was, how watched! She felt hunted and trapped as she turned the key in the lock, fell on her knees beside the luxurious bed with the brocade covers and hangings.

"Oh, God!" she said. "Oh, God! Don't let it be true!"

These words were in French; she did not know why she knelt, nor to what God she prayed, but childhood habits came back to her instinctively. Neither the words nor the attitude had in themselves any meaning, yet the emotion behind them was profound and terrible.

That evening Lady Sherlock told her husband that she would like to go to Paris at once.

"Why, that's a quick change of plan, my dear, isn't it?" he asked, in some surprise. "I thought you intended to remain here until the autumn?"

"Why, yes, I did. But don't question me, Robert; I haven't been a capricious woman, have I? I feel I'd like to go. My brother will be there, in attendance at the Tuileries. I ought, perhaps, to pay my respects to His Majesty."

"As you think." Sir Robert turned the suggestion over in his mind. He did not like to have his wife out of his sight, especially for several weeks. He felt disappointed and a little hurt. "Will you take the children?"

"No, of course not, it will interrupt their lessons. And Frank won't want Jenny to go."

"But Jenny will want to go with you," smiled Sir Robert. "Why not take her, it will be company for you. Buy yourself some hats and dresses."

"Yes, that's what I'm really going for," said Lady Sherlock hastily. "I found this morning that I've got really nothing in my wardrobe. I don't know how it is I've been so neglectful. You know how lazy I am at visiting dressmakers. Especially if Jenny is to be married in October I must have some clothes."

"Well, I dare say it will be very agreeable." Sir Robert liked the scheme better as he considered it further. He need not remain in England much longer, after all, and he might join his wife and daughter in Paris—say in a month's time—if only for a few days. He liked his wife to keep up her connection with the Court of France, he liked his daughter to be received into the aristocratic French society to which her mother belonged. Besides, poor Vivienne had seemed at once restless and languid lately; the change would do her good.

So he agreed, only saying, good-humouredly:

"It is unlike you, Vivian, to have whims. You shouldn't have come home at all. You should have stayed in Paris when you came back from Brittany. Why, it's only a fortnight ago."

"I know. I was in two minds, but then I wanted to see you all again. This time, yes, I think I'll take Jenny."

"I dare say Fanny would like to go, too."

"She's too young," said Lady Sherlock quickly. "Next year, perhaps, when she's fifteen."

Having obtained her husband's consent, Lady Sherlock rose as if in haste to escape. As he opened the door for her, he said:

"I have some news for you that will please you, I think. Mrs. Perry has gone, she left yesterday without telling anyone."

"Oh, I understand!" Lady Sherlock lost her frown, a slow colour mounted into her face; she put her hand to her throat as if sick.

"You're too sensitive," protested Sir Robert. "Don't take it like that. You were very kind to her. That leaves the Dower House empty," he added kindly. "Perhaps there is someone else to whom you'd like to lend it, Vivian?"

"No, I don't think so. It wasn't a very lucky experiment, was it? You may find someone for it yourself, Robert, this time, or shut it up."

The suggestion of a visit to Paris came as a surprise to Jenny, who was quite sure that her mother had some good reason for thus changing her mind. It was rarely that she undertook such a sudden action, her life ran on monotonous, almost drowsy lines, and her temperament was indolent and languid. It was all very well talking about clothes to her father, of course, but Jenny knew very well that neither of them needed new dresses and that if they had, they could get them in London. Lady Sherlock was not so particular about what she wore coming from Paris; she had her own tastes and her gowns were made to her own instructions. 'As for me, I am going to stay here quietly and shall wear nothing but muslin,' thought Jenny. She confided her doubts, almost her fears, to her father, and Sir Robert gladly took the opportunity of speaking to her seriously.

"Jenny, I don't think your mother is quite happy. I think there's something on her mind, some trouble."

"It's merely that old nightmare of Hamburg," said Jenny, gravely. "I know it comes over her sometimes, and she can't forget it. I know her so well, I see the shadow pass over her face."

"Yes, but, Jenny, she's more likely to remember those ugly episodes in Paris than here, surely? Besides," added Sir Robert, with a little tolerant, good-natured irony, "I don't think, Jenny dear, that your mother suffered so much in Hamburg. Why, some of the tales of what people went through in those days in France—"

"She's very sensitive. I think it's the death of Estienne de Saint-Alde. I don't know, she won't talk of it to me."

"Nor to me, either." Sir Robert made a grimace. "I wish I knew what was going on in her mind, Jenny. Perhaps she isn't happy here at all. Perhaps she feels in exile."

"Don't, Father, don't say that! It's not true!"

"Why is she so eager for you to get married?" asked Sir Robert, still puzzled and looking straight with candid eyes at his daughter. "You don't want it yourself, do you, Jenny? I mean soon?"

"Father, I can't tell, I don't know what to say!"

"Well, that's it! You can't tell, don't know what to say! You would if you were in love with Frank, you would if you wanted to be his wife."

"Well, I'm not in love with him like that. I don't think I want to be married in October. I'm giving in to please Mother."

"That's it! You're giving in to please Mother! I don't understand it. You were always, and are now, all in all to her, and yet she's eager to get you away. Well, you'll go with her on this Paris journey, Jenny. She said she'll only take Lockwood to be maid to you both, and hire a Frenchwoman over there. I suppose you'll stay in your uncle's hôtel?"

"I suppose so, Father. I wish she hadn't had this sudden idea, I don't want to go. I love Sherlock in the summer."

"Well, I dare say Frank could go over and see you, I believe he has some business over there. I wish he'd get his new appointment settled. Look after your mother, Jenny, and write to me frequently."

In a few days the arrangements were all made. With plenty of money and service at command it did not take long to get the two ladies and the maid ready.

Sir Robert and Sir Francis Quarry escorted them to Plymouth and saw them on board the packet. Lady Sherlock's cabin was sweet with large careless bunches of drooping flowers plucked and presented by her two younger children and Miss Prescott. She took some of these lilies and roses on to her lap and sat with them on the folds of her taffeta pelisse while she looked through the porthole on to the sunny scene.

'The day that I sailed to Hamburg,' she said to herself, 'I remember it was sunny like this.'

She had crossed the Channel several times since that journey, and she had made the return journey to Hamburg once, but she could never see the ocean without remembering the first time she had seen it when she had gone aboard the SACHSEN from St. Malo.

Mother and daughter were alone together, free of all the preparations of the journey, free of all the love and kindness of husband, father, brother and sister, friends and servants. They were isolated in the cabin on the ocean; Lockwood, the maid, had been sent away.

"Mother," said Jenny, sitting down beside Lady Sherlock and taking her hand, "why are we going to Paris? Won't you tell me, dear? Of course it's not to buy clothes."

"No, it's not to buy clothes, Jenny," smiled Lady Sherlock. "I can't disguise anything from you, can I? I can't tell you, either, why I decided to make the journey because I don't know myself."

"Oh, Mother!" said Jenny sadly. This sounded to her a terrible, a piteous confession, as if someone had admitted to being doomed. But why had she thought so? She remembered the cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, that she had read of in the Bible—the passage remained in her mind, 'no bigger than a man's hand'—a little cloud, like those in the May sky now.

"It was that day of the thunderstorm, was it not, Mother?" Her delicate brows frowned in an attempt to understand as she struggled with the mystery.

Lady Sherlock laughed suddenly and kissed the frown away with firm lips.

"Why, you mustn't make something out of nothing. I told your father I was not a capricious woman, but I had for once this whim—that I wanted to go to Paris, to see your uncle, I suppose, and your cousins too. Don't ask me any more about it, Jenny."

Jenny obeyed, but she was not satisfied.

It was with a sense of depression that she landed in France; the journey to Paris was dusty and tedious. When they at length arrived at the Hôtel de Vernon, which M. de Vernon had had restored to him with the return of the Bourbons, both were, fatigued, the elder woman in a state of complete lassitude, but Jenny tingling with energy; exhausted as her body was, her spirit was alert and watchful.

For nearly a week they were alone with the servants, for M. de Vernon and his family were staying in Brittany. Lady Sherlock had not been expected in Paris until the autumn and she begged her brother not to upset his plans for her; she awaited his reply.

There were callers and visitors to entertain and, as a matter of routine duty, dressmakers and milliners to be visited, the last of the opera and the theatres to see.

A week after her arrival in Paris, Lady Sherlock watched the sands running out through an hour-glass; this marking of the passage of time soothed her.

Everything had soothed her since she had come to Paris, including the letter she had just received from her brother, saying he was bringing his children up to the capital in a few days' time and that he had pleasant news to give her, 'something that will make you very happy indeed.'

Lady Sherlock had not answered this letter: Her indolent temperament and her placid mood alike combined to make her lazy. But, like a child with a promise of a mysterious treat in store, she turned over in her mind what this surprise could be. There was something infantile about the very phrase and she had laughed over it with Jenny. It was something, perhaps, that concerned her nephews and nieces, of whom she was so fond, as fond as she was of her own children, although she seemed more like their grandmother than their aunt.

But Jenny had said no, she was sure that it must be something personal. Uncle Charles would never have made so much of a matter that merely concerned his own children. And so the two women had laughed over the tantalizing promise made by M. de Vernon.

It was now two days before he was due in Paris, and Lady Sherlock lay in her favourite attitude on the chaise-longue by the muslin-draped windows watching the sands run through the hour-glass. She had been wise to come to Paris, although she would not even now admit that she had come because she was afraid. How stupid! Afraid of what? She had merely had a crise de nerfs, there was no accounting for such things. And she scolded herself as an idle, ineffectual woman who did not often enough and sufficiently count her blessings.

But there, all was over now. It had been delightful to be in Paris, to see the last of the chestnut flowers and the tresses of lilacs and laburnums in the Tuileries. Jenny had been happy too, and how radiant an experience it had been to watch that happiness! Jenny, never very interested in clothes, had been induced by her mother to buy some frocks in the Palais-Royal, and to wear her wide-brimmed straw hat with the violet and blue velvet ribbon with a coquetry that would have seemed out of place at Sherlock.

Sir Robert had written by every packet, and so had the children; everything was safe and comfortable and happy at home. That was good. It gave Lady Sherlock a feeling of stability to think of Sherlock and its inhabitants behind her, to remember the daily routine there, everyone in his or her appointed place: Mr. West and Miss Prescott going about their precise duties, the children with work and play alternating in a careful routine, Sir Robert with his dogs and his horses and his duties in Winton. Ah, delight to think of all that!

What she did not like to think of was the empty Dower House that she had lent so good-heartedly to Mrs. Perry. It was odd that there she was not quite cured, her nerves were not strong in that direction. She had had heavy dreams of that house, the shuttered windows; seen the woman, her poor secret discovered, hastening from room to room, taking from the furniture that was not hers the few garments that she owned, not waiting for any farewells but quietly, even mysteriously, hiring a man to take her valises down to the coach, booking a seat there and leaving the village, unobserved, by the London mail.

The sands had run out of the glass, the top portion was empty.

Lady Sherlock sat up suddenly.

'How lazy I've become! I ought to go home, I have my duty there, my place!'

Was there thunder again in the air? She felt depressed, as she had been depressed that day at Sherlock, the day of the thunderstorm when she had run—yes, that was the word—she had run, not walked, down to the inn to make inquiries about M. Beyrolles.

She rose and drew apart the light, daintily frilled muslin curtains that hung inside the folds of old Genovese brocade in flame-coloured silk and gold thread. Her brother, who occupied a high post in the Royal household and who had proved himself, too, a good businessman who had speculated prudently and successfully on the Bourse, had refurnished this hôtel with sumptuous taste, and Lady Sherlock was glad that there was nothing about it to remind her of her childhood, glad to come to it afresh as if she had been a total stranger. It had not, like the château in Brittany, a ghost in every nook and corner. She had visited this house when she was a child, but not often, for her parents had not frequently brought their children to the capital, and all the furniture was now changed.

She gazed aimlessly down at the street; the sky had darkened surely, a few drops of rain were beginning to fall.

Where was Jenny? It was not often the child left her so long alone. Then Lady Sherlock remembered that Madame de Marsac had called for the girl to take her to a reception.

Idly, and still soothed in mind and body by her pleasant surroundings, by her agreeable thoughts, the lady glanced at the clock, a delicate piece of workmanship in Sèvres porcelain above which were poised two cupids endeavouring to shoot with tiny gilt arrows at a hooded figure of Father Time.

Yes, it was nearly five o'clock, the hour at which Jenny, she remembered now, had promised to return.

Hardly knowing what she did, for her thoughts were far away, she turned the hourglass with an idle hand. At that moment the manservant opened the door and said there was a lady below who wished to see her.

"What is her name?" asked Lady Sherlock carelessly. "I do not think I am receiving now."

The man then explained that it was not one of madame's friends, but a middle-aged lady of modest appearance who said that she would give her name herself, but that she brought an introduction from M. de Vernon.

"Why, of course!" replied Lady Sherlock. "Ask her to come up immediately."

She thought she knew who the lady was likely to be; her brother, knowing of the Home at Fulham, had told her that there was a good woman of his acquaintance in Paris who interested herself in that kind of work and she had told him of the desperate case of one or two English girls whom she knew, who were without homes or hopes in Paris.

'Yes, of course, that is who it must thought Lady Sherlock, and she cast a shamefaced glance about the handsomely furnished room. Surely this good woman, who lived, as her brother had told her, in poverty in Paris in order to carry out charitable work, would think that both she and her apartment were rather frivolous? She was waiting to receive the stranger not only courteously but with good will, when the door opened again and Jenny entered in her silver-striped, rose-coloured tarletan and her wide-brimmed hat.

"Oh, Mother, there is a strange, amusing-looking creature down below asking to see you! Henri is bringing her up."

"Hush, dear, it is a lady who has an introduction from your uncle. She is to help me with some work," Lady Sherlock concluded rather lamely, for she remembered her promise to her husband not to involve her daughter in any way in her sad charities.

"Then you want me to go, Mother? That is a pity, because I wished to tell you of the reception and the people who were there. It was very gay indeed, you should have come."

"You can't run away now, Jenny, you would pass her on the stairs. Just speak to her a few pleasant words, and then you may go with whatever excuse you can think of."

"Very well, Mother. I should like to see your face when you meet her. She is a curious creature."

"She's a long time coming upstairs," smiled Lady Sherlock. "Jenny, will you open the window a little? It is really very oppressive, I believe there is going to be a thunderstorm."

"Yes, there are so many jokes made about the thunderstorms in an English summer, but there seem to me to be a good many in Paris, too," replied Jenny as she opened the window and the slight breeze, so often the forerunner of a storm, at once blew the pale, light curtains into the dark room.

The servant entered, announcing:

"A lady to see Madame."

Lady Sherlock stood with her hand extended as the stranger made her entrance.

Jenny had not been wrong in saying that she had a curious appearance. She was tall and angular, yet possessed an undeniable grace and distinction. Her clothes were good, but did not fit her very well; her wide skirt of shining purple satin was out of fashion. The top part of her figure was covered with an Andalusian shawl of great beauty and value. Her bonnet was neither fashionable nor out of date; it was such as had been worn for several years by respectable women of middle age, the coal-scuttle brim was shrouded with a lace veil then drawn aside and a stiff black silk frill outlined the face while a large bow of the same ribbon was tied under her chin.

This face was very severe in expression; there was a cast of nobility in the features, the nose was slightly aquiline, the chin slightly cleft; the lips had been beautiful in shape, but were now drawn, withered, and bleached, like the face. The eyes were exceedingly black and lively and sparkled beneath a pair of heavy brows that sprang like wings from the base of the nose. As far as it went, the countenance was that of an austere, religious, dignified woman of middle age and probably aristocratic birth.

But this effect was spoiled by the fact that the lady used a good deal of rather crude make-up; powder and rouge not very skilfully applied accentuated instead of disguising the heavy lines of her face, and the loss of contour and bloom on the lips was not replaced by the touches of crimson paint that outlined them. This maquillage was not, however, so very remarkable since even the most austere and demure of Frenchwomen used some means to heighten their charms, and otherwise the lady's appearance was unexceptional. She carried gloves, a reticule, a purple parasol, frilled on the ebony handle.

The stranger smiled in a friendly fashion, showing a set of teeth still extremely good, and Jenny, on a closer inspection, found her likable, even fascinating. But her manners, the young girl thought, were certainly a little

strange. Instead of curtsying or making an obeisance to a lady of so much higher rank and one of whom she came to beg a favour, as the girl supposed, the stranger remained upright, smiling her hands crossed on the parasol she held in front of her with its spike in the carpet, looking straight into the face of Lady Sherlock, who seemed to take no notice at all of this odd behaviour; indeed, Jenny observed with instant fear, her mother's own behaviour was unusual.

For Lady Sherlock had raised her outstretched hand to her eyes and, turning away, sank down on the chaise-longue by the window, while the visitor, turning her head stiffly in the shuttlecock bonnet, continued to gaze at her with a set smile.

"You wish to speak to madame by yourself, Mother, don't you?" asked Jenny, quietly, speaking in English.

But as if she had not heard, Lady Sherlock replied, and in French:

"Jenny, close the window, the room has become very cold. And the wind, what a wind!" The curtains were blowing their frail, transparent lengths into the room, and Jenny closed the window.

What was happening? Something strange. She looked at the visitor, who had still not moved and who was still smiling, showing the even row of teeth against the brightly painted lips.

"Mother," asked Jenny suddenly, "who is this woman? What does she want?"

"I don't know," said Lady Sherlock, still in French. "Jenny, I don't know."

Now the visitor spoke. With a quick movement, drawing the veil yet farther away from her face, she said, in a voice that was cracked and harsh yet that seemed to endeavour to be ingratiating.

"You don't know, Vivienne? I am Estienne de Saint-Alde, your little friend from Hamburg!"

"Estienne de Saint-Alde!" repeated Lady Sherlock. "Estienne de Saint-Alde!"

"Why, Mother!" exclaimed Jenny. She was too amazed for the moment to collect her senses or gather her forces, for surely her mother had told her that Estienne de Saint-Alde had died in her arms in Hamburg, how many years?—twenty-five, thirty years ago? Long before she was born, at least.

"Of course, it is a long time ago," said the visitor, with a little sigh and a downcast look. "I am afraid I am a good deal changed, far more changed than you are, my dear Vivienne. At the same time I am very disappointed you did not recognize me. This was to be your brother's pleasant surprise."

"My brother's surprise!" repeated Lady Sherlock stupidly.

"Yes, I have been staying with him in Brittany. I did not want him to give you the good news, but came to see you myself."

"Good news," repeated Jenny. "Mother, this is very strange. This is Mlle de Saint-Alde. After all these years!"

Lady Sherlock stared at her daughter as if she suddenly remembered that she was present, and rising, said:

"Of course, you are Estienne de Saint-Alde. I remember now. I should have recognized you anywhere. But after all these years, and so suddenly!"

Gratified at this recognition, although it had been somewhat delayed, Mlle de Saint-Alde became exceedingly agreeable.

"Pray sit down," said Jenny, and the lady, with some fussy arrangement of her skirt and shawl, sank into a large armchair that was given to her, and allowed Jenny to take her reticule, gloves, umbrella.

As if a nervous strain had suddenly been relieved, all three began to talk together. Mlle de Saint-Alde began to explain where she had been, why she had come to Brittany, and the great emotion she felt at seeing her dear friend Vivienne again; Lady Sherlock began to explain how it was she had not recognized her old friend at once. And Jenny, whom her mother on a note that was almost passionate had begged not to leave the room, tried to gloss over what she felt was an embarrassing position. She could feel with her acute sensitiveness exactly her mother's sensations. Lady Sherlock had been taken deeply by surprise, and instead of this being an agreeable interview it was rather a shocking experience.

How could it be otherwise? Jenny remembered how the little girl in Hamburg had been described—pretty, loving, vivacious, soft; and here was a gaunt, middle-aged woman who bore few traces of beauty, whose voice was harsh, whose clothes were uncouth and in bad taste, who seemed as if she could be moody and sullen, even gross and spiteful.

Of course, Lady Sherlock had been shocked, almost alarmed, and it was difficult for her to disguise her feelings and to welcome her old friend as she felt she ought to have done; a dozen questions darted through Jenny's mind. Where had Mlle de Saint-Alde been all this while? Had she a family, relatives living? Why had she gone first to Brittany? Did she want anything of them? There was undoubtedly a fascination, almost a magnetism, about her personality, eccentric and bizarre as it was.

And as the stranger went on chattering, brokenly, almost incoherently, of her adventures in the Hamburg days, Jenny, always just, reminded herself that women changed a good deal between the ages of fourteen and fifty, or fifty-five, whatever the age of Mlle de Saint-Alde might be now, and that there was really nothing to be surprised at in the appearance of Estienne de Saint-Alde.

After a while Lady Sherlock's composure returned. She became animated, almost gay, and the sense of tension and distress was lessened; but Lady Sherlock seemed to think some explanation was required of her conduct and amazement when she had first heard her friend announce her own name. She said:

"It's the thunder, you know, the thunder! It is strange how I feel any thunder in the air. I was foolish enough to open the window because the room was hot."

Jenny remarked, if the visitor did not, that it was the coolness Lady Sherlock had complained of before; but no doubt her mother was very justifiably agitated and Jenny was far too delighted to see her becoming herself again to notice this discrepancy in her complaints about the weather.

Mlle de Saint-Alde showed no disposition to leave; she had a great deal to talk about and she accepted at once the invitation to dinner that Lady Sherlock offered her.

"We were going out tonight, Mother, said Jenny gently.

"Oh, but this is something extraordinary!" cried Lady Sherlock, whose cheeks were flushed and eyes sparkling. "I cannot let Estienne go again at once. We must have dinner together now she has come back, as it were, from the grave."

"Yes, indeed, it must seem like that to you. You will be wondering," said that lady with a smile, "why I did not come to you before. Well, that's a long story—or, rather, several long stories. I had my misfortunes and my pride. I have been all over the world and learnt so many lessons." She nodded toward Jenny. "I have never married, you know, although I had some brilliant offers. It would

amuse your young daughter to read some of my old love-letters one of these days." She laughed coyly. "I earned enough money. I suppose I became what people would call a little odd. I've been a governess, and I've taught cooking and embroidery and languages and music. I've even been to America, the New World—what do you think of that?"

"Why did you keep silent all these years?" asked Lady Sherlock, looking on the ground. "Why did you not let me know of your existence and that you were preparing to surprise me?"

"Oh, I don't know. Perhaps I can explain later." The lady smiled, still with a bright yet indifferent air. "It was one thing and another. But now I'm not so young; indeed, I might confess that I'm getting old, and I thought I should like to settle down and look up some of my old friends. Of course, I've heard of you, though you've lost sight of me. I've read about you in the newspapers, heard about you from people who know you. What a splendid marriage you made, Vivienne, and your three beautiful children! And your brother with his estates restored. Why, it is all a happy ending like those old romances we used to read in Hamburg."

"Yes, I've been fortunate," said Lady Sherlock, "very fortunate until now."

"There's no reason why you shouldn't go on being fortunate to the end. You've only got to be what you always were, prudent and wise. You've only got to recognize the inevitable." Jenny was rather surprised at this philosophy from the lady's lips; she undoubtedly was an oddity, but she also undoubtedly had charm. There was an energy and force about her; she seemed to possess, too, a quizzical humour. She went on to relate how she had enjoyed her stay in the château de Vernon, where she had been a guest for a couple of weeks.

"I made friends with all the children, they really begin to love me. Do you know what they call me?" She put her finger to her cheek. "I must confess that I had a touch of scrofula when I was in Italy, and it has left my face very rough; the children say, as my cheek pricks like their father's, and as I have the misfortune to have two or three hairs sprouting from my chin, they call me—what do you think?—Tante Barbel Aunt Beardie, as you would say in English."

Part III

As Jenny Saw It

At first it seemed to Jenny altogether startling and almost incredible that Mlle de Saint-Alde should have returned thus into her mother's life. But after a few days had passed by and the old lady had begun to take her place quite naturally in the routine of the pleasant life at the Hôtel de Vernon, Jenny told herself that of course it was only the unexpectedness of the episode that had made her think it so strange. For Mlle de Saint-Alde had a good straightforward tale to tell and, after all, her adventures were as nothing to some of those undergone by the victims of the French Revolution, and Lady Sherlock corroborated what she had to say in every details everything that her friend recalled, she, too, remembered.

The two ladies had, in front of Jenny, dwelt on recollections of those days in Hamburg, when M. de Saint-Alde, after the death of Gilles, the servant, had

taken on the entire support and protection of the two girls; curious for Jenny to hear her mother—who had been so reserved—now discussing the past like this.

Jenny learned that for a while the fugitives had lived in the post-house outside the city and then, as M. de Saint-Alde became more confident and as he got into touch with one or two acquaintances in Hamburg, they took a handsomely furnished house where they lived in considerable comfort and even luxury, for the banker knew nothing of small economies, and he had expected the Bourbons to be restored any day.

"Our great distress," gossiped Mlle de Saint-Alde, frankly, as they sat on the balcony of the Hôtel de Vernon in the blue July twilight, "was not hearing from home, was it not, Vivienne?"

Lady Sherlock agreed, eagerly enough, that that had been their great distress.

"But, Mother, do you care to talk of the past?" asked Jenny, rather anxiously. "You know at home you never like to talk of these things."

"Then I am a great fool," cried Mlle de Saint-Alde remorsefully, "to bring up the matter now. But it's so strange for us to meet again, and the end is so happy that," she added wistfully, "there is a pleasure in going over those old, dark days. And they were not so dark after all, were they, Vivienne? My father and I did what we could to look after you."

"You did look after me very well," whispered Lady Sherlock. "Indeed, I am indebted to you for everything. I had no money at all of my own. I suppose Gilles had something in the valise he brought with him, but I never knew what it was."

"I don't believe it was very much," smiled Mlle de Saint-Alde. "You must remember, dear, that I was older than you and always in my father's confidence. He used to reproach us with the amount of money we spent—we were thoughtless girls, were we not?" She gave her harsh, yet coquettish laugh. "We would have our frills and furbelows though the good gentleman's purse grew leaner and leaner. And then he died. I won't sadden you by dwelling on that, but I loved him dearly, my poor father."

She drew a large white handkerchief out of her reticule and wiped her eyes.

"I loved him too," said Lady Sherlock. "He was not, of course, what my own father was to me; but I did love him for his open heart and his goodness, the way he looked after me, for I was a stranger to him."

"You were helpless and thrown on our protection," sighed Mlle de Saint-Alde. "Dear me, how long ago it seems, like another life!"

"How is it you lost sight of one another?" asked Jenny. "I always understood from Mother that you died—yes, died—in her arms."

"What a horrible thing to say, Jenny!" exclaimed Lady Sherlock, with a flash of temper. "I never said so. I didn't like to speak of it, because we got separated and I did not know what had happened to Estienne."

Jenny blushed. It was the first time that her mother had rebuked her so sharply. She bit her lips as the tears came into her eyes. Before this stranger, too! She could not think of the gaunt Mlle de Saint-Alde as anything but a stranger. But it was she who made the peace. Patting Jenny's hand, she said:

"There, I have come to make trouble between you—the sweetest daughter and the sweetest mother in the world, I'll be sworn. Yes, I think it is quite likely your mother did imagine I had died. You see, I had typhus. My father died of it and I was taken to the hospital. And while I was. at the hospital your mother's friends

came for her and took her home again. When I came out I could not get any trace of her. Some friends whom I knew in Hamburg, all the horrors of the Revolution then being over, sent me to Switzerland, for I was very ill, still. Of course, I was penniless, too, and for long after, for while Bonaparte was in power what was the use of trying to get any of my father's fortune?"

"Why did you wait, mademoiselle, for so long after the Bourbons were restored?" asked Jenny. "I always understood that your father lent the French King a large sum of money."

"Yes, and I had the papers," said Mlle de Saint-Alde. "I showed M. de Vernon all of them. No matter what my vicissitudes or my misfortunes were, I always kept those very carefully. Why did I not come forward before?" She raised her thick brows and made a half-comic grimace. "Well, one can't always count on the gratitude of princes. I suppose, in my way, I was enjoying myself."

"Surely the King will do something for you now?" asked Jenny.

"Your mother has been good and gracious enough to promise to go with me to the Tuileries to discover what the King will do for the daughter of the man who lent him so large a sum of money, but unfortunately so long ago."

"Yes, of course I will go with you," agreed Lady Sherlock. "Something will undoubtedly be done for you."

"Oh yes, I have promises already," said the lady. "I think they will give me a pension and perhaps apartments at Versailles. But now I have become restless and I don't know that I want to settle down anywhere, even in a palace. I used to write to the King, M. d'Artois as he was then, from Hamburg. But he never answered; now, perhaps, it is too late."

She leaned back with a sigh into the shadows.

"My life has been very strange. I could tell you some peculiar stories."

"It has, perhaps," returned Lady Sherlock, in a low voice, "been no stranger than mine. Though you have moved about, as you say, so much that you have become restless, and I have remained in one place so long that I have become slothful."

Jenny wondered if that old schoolgirl affection had been renewed between her mother and her friend. She did not think it likely. The two women, after so long and after such differences, must have met like strangers. Perhaps as time went on and they saw a good deal of each other, touching remembrances would come into their minds and the old affection might be revived. Jenny hoped that this might be so and that some happiness might come to her mother through this friendship, resurrected, as it were, from the dead.

She had not yet been able to put together all the details of Mlle de Saint-Alde's story, nor did she trouble to do so. But Jenny was interested in the old woman's recital in which she had brought back very sharply a phase of her mother's life in which Jenny had always been intensely interested—those strange days in Hamburg.

And Jenny could now see her mother, the girl who, having lost her one companion, the faithful servant, was alone with these strangers, kind, but still strangers, in a foreign city, without news for so long of her family...Poor mother, poor darling mother! No wonder that her nerves had been strained and that a generation of happiness had not been able to restore her to perfect peace of mind.

And Jenny dwelt long in her rather austere and grave mind, on the strange differences between the destinies of these two women who had been girls together the same place, in the self-same peril.

When M. de Vernon arrived in Paris, he greeted Tante Barbe, as he termed her, as if she were an old friend, and it appeared that the strange lady had ingratiated herself with everyone in the Bretor, château where she had arrived, one evening, in a modest, hired chaise with a small amount of baggage and the precious papers that proved her identity.

M. de Vernon laughingly declared that these were not needed. His visitor had a perfect recollection of those Hamburg days, which fitted in to the smallest detail with everything that his parents and his sister had ever told him of her period of exile. Everyone in the château de Vernon had found Aunt Beardie—there was soon no other name for her—a fascinating companion.

It had been no mere boast, M. de Vernon informed his sister, that she was a skilful needlewoman and an exquisite cook. She had displayed her arts in both these directions to the satisfaction of his wife and children. She knew some excellent recipes that she had collected in the course of her travels and seemed never so happy as when in the kitchen of the stillroom. Her embroidery was exquisite, she was fond of making little caps for the children and even for the servants. She had besides, M. de Vernon said, an extremely good heart, and was always trying to do little kindnesses for people.

"Of course," he added, "it is obvious, Vivienne, that she has become a little unusual. Poor creature, who knows what she has suffered or where she has been?"

"Do you think her eccentric?" asked Lady Sherlock urgently. "She seems to me just what a woman might be who had undergone what she has."

"Yes, yes, that's what I mean. She is strange—her dress, for instance. She would be quite handsome if she took a little more pains with her appearance. But you know she will never go to dressmakers, she swears she can never spare the time. And she begs old clothes from all her friends and acquaintances!" M. de Vernon laughed good-humouredly. "Hélène said she had very few clothes with her when she came to Vernon, and that she asked for some of her cast-offs almost at once. Of course, they were much too small for her. But a cupboardful of dresses that belonged, I suppose, to our grand-mother, was found, and others brought from the neighbourhood. And these were cut and altered about, a sleeve here and a flounce there, and with these she was set up as you saw her when she arrived in Paris."

Lady Sherlock made no comment; she seemed apathetic.

"One can understand," said Jenny, who sat on the sofa by her mother and pressed her hand affectionately, "that after such a life as poor Aunt Beardie must have led, exiled and, I suppose, hunted—"

"Yes, that's what she was," confirmed M. de Vernon gravely, "hunted—she used that word. When she left Hamburg there were spies after her, or so she thinks. And I suppose that's the same thing."

"Who would they be?" asked Jenny breathlessly.

"Well, she thinks they might have been Royalists agents trying to get those papers back that proved how much was owed by M. d'Artois, and later perhaps Napoleonic agencies after her as a Royalist. She doesn't know, and I dare say her mind was disturbed and she imagined a good deal. But she's had some stranger adventures, things she doesn't like to talk about, I believe."

"Why should she return now?" murmured Lady Sherlock, gazing down at the floor as if she gazed through the carpet and the boards and even beyond. "Why now, after all these years?"

"I'm glad she has," said M. de Vernon. "She's an amiable creature, clever, interesting, amusing. And she has a good claim on His Majesty, I must say. There is the actual paper signed with his hand. Half a million lives—without that he could never have escaped to the Rhine. She has been generous in not coming forward before."

"She has a number of other papers, too, I suppose?" asked Lady Sherlock, suddenly glancing at her brother.

"Oh yes, she has kept those. She said her father made her swear to do so. He had the precaution to bring these vital documents from Paris when he fled."

"What are they? Have you seen them, Charles?"

M. de Vernon said that he had seen and examined the papers as a matter of precaution.

"Of course, I didn't suspect poor Aunt Beardie for a moment, but there have been cases of impersonation, and after all these years of strange vicissitudes, of Europe in turmoil for so long—"

"And I suppose after you'd seen the papers you had no doubts whatever?" said Lady Sherlock.

"Why, of course not. It would have been all the same if I had, seeing that you recognized her as soon as you saw her," he added good-humouredly.

"Yes, it wouldn't have been much good anyone trying to impersonate Mlle de Saint-Alde, would it?" added Jenny. "For mother had only to see her to know whether she was the right person or not. But, Mother, could you recognize her really after all that time? I thought you seemed astounded when she came into the room."

"I was astounded, dear, because I really thought she was dead, that was all. Of course I recognized her at once. You must yourself see the likeness to that picture I have at home—the dark blue eyes, the heavy brows—"

"Yes, I suppose so," said Jenny doubtfully, "seeing how people alter, and how many years have gone by, and this difference between a child and an elderly woman. She's much older than you, isn't she, Mother?"

"I believe so, I never know. She seemed to me what you would call a grown-up, girl while I was only a child, but there was only a year or two between us, I suppose."

"Well, it is a very agreeable thing to have happened," said M. de Vernon, "and I hope, Vivienne, it will really bring you a good deal of happiness. Myself, I shall do all I can for the poor lady. There are a great number of people in Paris now who owe her father money. Of course, his bank was wound up and all his affairs went into confusion, and I suppose the debts couldn't be proved. But no doubt they will be very willing to show some recognition to his daughter."

"Has she no relatives?" asked Jenny.

"I don't think she's a chance of getting any of her father's property. That has changed hands more than once. But she's sufficient friends and well-wishers to see that she gets a pension," evaded M. de Vernon.

"Poor Aunt Beardie, what will she do if she cannot get a pension, or even if she does get a pension?"

"Yes," said Lady Sherlock, again looking up. "What will she do, Charles, when she has her pension and her room at Versailles? She says herself she is too restless to stay there."

"I don't know. She's a strange creature, as we all keep agreeing. She seems to have taken a great affection for us. The children are very fond of her, too, and Hélène likes her. She can stay at Vernon, of course, as long as she pleases. It's quite enough for me"—and he stooped and kissed his sister's forehead affectionately—"that she, was your companion in those dreadful days in Hamburg, Vivienne, and that her father looked after you when there was no one else to do so."

Lady Sherlock turned abruptly away. Staring at Jenny, she said:

"I think all this talk of the old days is depressing me. I begin to feel nervous again, as I felt in Sherlock. I think we should go home, Jenny, your father will be missing us. We've had enough of balls and receptions, have we not?"

"Yes, indeed, Mother, if you say so; I am very willing to return."

"There's Frank, too; he'll be wanting to see you."

"You should ask Aunt Beardie to England," suggested M. de Vernon pleasantly. "She talks so much already of Fanny and Bobby."

"Aunt Beardie!" Lady Sherlock laughed faintly. "What a strange name it seems to hove given her—Aunt Beardie."

"Yes, I suppose it is. But she seems so pleased with it herself. I was ashamed when I heard the children using it. But she does not seem a bit vain, though she puts all that powder and paint on her face. She says frankly that she does so because since her illness she looks so bleak and ghastly."

"The children like her, don't they?" asked Lady Sherlock. "I suppose mine will, too. That's a strange thought."

"Yes, she's a kind of fascinating personality, and full of good stories. A pity she never married. She would have made a delightful mistress of a home."

"Why didn't she marry?"

"I don't know. I think her misfortunes made her capricious. She had several offers, she's shown me the letters."

"Shown you her love-letters, Charles?"

"Yes. And she seemed proud of them. After all, she's a good deal older than you, Vivienne, I suppose? She was quite pathetic and did not want to show me a copy of her baptismal register. She must be nearly sixty, you know."

"I suppose so, I suppose so. It doesn't matter, Charles, does it? She's had her life and rye had mine. But it is depressing, in a way, that we should come together like this."

"Depressing? My dear, I thought it would make you quite happy."

And Jenny echoed:

"Oh, Mother, I am disappointed too. I thought you'd be happy."

"Happy! That's a strange word. We use it so often, and don't know what it means. But then, I am talking nonsense again. I am homesick, Jenny, and"—Lady Sherlock seemed to make an effort and faced her brother—"of course, I'll help you to do all you can for Aunt Beardie."

"The King was gracious the other day; he made me a half-promise and so did the Minister. She'll get her pension. They talk of giving her a post-office. A number of people will be kind to her—I've written to several myself."

"But I don't think she'll be happy in England, Charles."

"No, my dear, I dare say not for a long stay. But she'd like to see your home. She seemed quite proud to think of your good marriage and your children. She has really a very touching affection for you, Vivienne, there's no doubt about that."

M. de Vernon spoke with a slight accent of reproach as if he thought that his sister was too nervous, whimsical and squeamish, and did not return as warmly as he would have liked the loving interest that her friend was offering in her affairs. M. de Vernon had always been passionately fond of his elder sister and had held her in great respect because of her unfortunately broken youth, her years of exile and of anxiety. It had always been his wish to find some means of repaying the debt he felt that the de Vernons owed the Saint-Aldes, and it had been at his expense that a handsome cenotaph had been set up to the memory of the banker in the church of, his native town. But his body, thrown into an unknown grave in the Hamburg cemetery, could not be traced.

Now there was a golden opportunity come to hand, and the generous, warm-hearted gentleman was delighted to think that he might at last repay the debt. He was pleased, too, to be able to do a service to a woman whom he liked and respected, for Aunt Beardie seemed to him courageous, good-humoured and intelligent. So he had had a double motive—a sense of gratitude and a personal liking—when he had warmly pressed her claims at the Court. He was therefore surprised and disappointed at the slight coldness that his sister showed towards one for whom she should have felt so strong a tie.

"Poor Aunt Beardie, you know, is homeless," he urged. "Jenny darling, don't you think that your mother should ask her to Sherlock?"

"No, I can't," said Lady Sherlock suddenly. "It would be like having a ghost about the house; don't you understand, Charles? Besides, she doesn't speak a word of English; she wouldn't be happy. Imagine her with Miss Prescott, Mr. West, the children and my husband. Charles, it's impossible; say it's impossible!"

She showed signs of such a rising excitement that M. de Vernon and Jenny were both going to say: "Of course, if you don't wish it"—but at that moment Aunt Beardie herself appeared in the doorway. She wore the poke bonnet with the ruche round her face and the bow under her chin, and the veil that she was seldom without, and she gave her keen look and her lively smile to one after the other of the three people there as she closed the door.

"What is that you say, my dear Vivienne? You are talking about my visit to Sherlock? You say something about its being impossible? You think, perhaps, that I am too old and crotchety to travel, to face the Channel? Nothing of the kind. Of course I am coming to Sherlock. I shall come with you when you return, and I hope that you will ask me to make a long stay." She looked at Lady Sherlock as she spoke, and her rather cracked voice, tuned to a softer note, repeated: "You want me to stay, don't you?"

"Of course."

Jenny had not thought very much of Francis Quarry while she had been in Paris. Her days had been full of movement, of interest, and to a certain extent of novelty, for she had not spent so long in Paris and at the Court before, her mother having always rather shrunk from such formalities and having, besides, judged Jenny too young to be brought forward much in Parisian society.

Besides, there had been the advent of Aunt Beardie, and Jenny really looked upon this as an excitement. It seemed to her something very pleasing and

touching. She had soon got over her first shock, that was almost touched with disgust, on learning that the charming young girl of the pencil sketch that her mother had once and with much emotion shown her should have changed into this harsh-featured, ageing lady. Or, rather, elderly, if Aunt Beardie was correct about her own age. But Jenny thought that she was exaggerating. She could not really be as old as she said she was—she must have altered the date on the copy of the baptismal entry.

But there seemed to the high-spirited and serious-minded girl something very touching in this history of the bereaved woman, whose childhood and girlhood had been ruined through the vicissitudes of revolution and war, but who had preserved after so many adventures—some of them she herself admitted almost desperate—so much humour, kindliness and skill.

Much of what had puzzled Jenny in Aunt Beardie's story was explained to her by her uncle, who told her, with a good deal of delicacy and hesitation—for this was not a matter in which the French nobleman thought a young girl should concern herself—that poor Aunt Beardie was born out of wedlock. No one, in fact, knew who her mother was. The names on the copy of register of her birth, which she had so carefully preserved, were both fictitious, and though M. de Saint-Alde had from the first acknowledged her, had had her brought up as his daughter, though he had never, while he was in Hamburg, mentioned this stain on her birth, and though undoubtedly it had been his intention to provide for her handsomely, still she had no legal claim on any of his moneys and estates, even supposing that these could now be traced or redeemed from the people to whom they had been given, or who had seized them during the turmoils of the last twenty years.

"I understand," sighed Jenny thoughtfully. "Poor Mlle de Saint-Alde!"

"You see," said M. de Vernon, "she has not any right even to that name. I don't suppose she knows herself who her mother was. Of course, it makes it very difficult to help her. And now you can understand, Jenny dear, why she was so diffident in coming to Paris and putting forward her claim. I do not suppose that when she lived in Hamburg she herself knew of her misfortune. But, of course, when she began to investigate she must have found out how she was debarred from inheriting any of her father's property."

"The King surely will not repudiate her claim because of this?"

"My dear child," said M. de Vernon with a sad smile, "you little understand Court! His Majesty is an honest man and one who would wish to repay his debts, of that I feel assured. But he is also very much under the dominion of his confessor and one or two other, people who would be very sorry to see him pay away several millions to a stranger—and several millions it is now, with the interest."

"But she has the very paper that His Majesty signed. I've seen it myself," protested Jenny.

"Yes," said M. de Vernon, still with the tender smile on his face as he regarded the eager young girl, so keen a champion of the oppressed and the unhappy, "but I do not know that that paper says the money would be paid to M. de Saint-Alde's heirs, even supposing that poor Aunt Beardie can prove she is his legal heir. Nevertheless, something will be done for her, of that I am assured. She will have a handsome pension and she will be recognized; quite a number of people who were her father's friends will do all they can to help her,

and she will certainly get apartments in Versailles, where there are, Heaven knows, enough and to spare. Do you like her, Jenny?" he added.

"Yes, I do. I think it is so happy, too, for Mother. I know she was grieving a great deal over the death of Estienne de Saint-Alde. Of course, I can't quite fuse the two; you know what I mean, Uncle Charles—the picture and what I've heard my mother say of Estienne, and this Aunt Beardie, that's quite reasonable, isn't it?"

"Of course, Jenny, it's quite reasonable. It you come across somebody in her extreme youth and then don't see her again until she is—well, Aunt Beardie's age, naturally it's difficult, as you say, to fuse the two personalities."

"You know, I think Mother finds that too. I believe she was a little distressed, awkward in fact, but now she seems happy again. Indeed, I hardly remember her in higher spirits."

"Mlle de Saint-Alde," M. de Vernon assured his niece, "is very, very pleased to have met your mother again. She was timid, at first, I think; she felt that she had become different. She has, in a sense, lost her station in life."

"What sort of adventures do you think she has had, Uncle?" asked the young girl seriously. "She spoke of brilliant offers of marriage."

"Yes, poor lady, she showed us some of her love-letters. There's no doubt about it. She has been a very fascinating creature. These men who were her suitors were all of the highest rank. But I suppose she is a little tired, a little broken, and, as she said herself, restless, and has found it hard to settle down. Then there was the question of money, she never had any dowry.",

"I wonder why she didn't come forward before, though. It was such a long time to have allowed to go by."

"I think," replied M. de Vernon gravely, "her own explanation is the right one—that she has been getting old, the time for adventure is past, and she wants a home, some comfort."

"Do you know where she's been all this time?"

"Oh, I expect she'll tell you her adventures bit by bit. I've assured your mother, my dear, that she need not be afraid-to take her into her house. I am quite sure that Mlle de Saint-Alde, wherever she has been or whatever she has done, has never forgotten that she is a French gentlewoman."

"Oh, no, I don't suppose so. I asked only out of friendly curiosity and interest. Sometimes I feel, Uncle Charles, that I should like a life like that. Is it wrong to say so? I'm very happy at Sherlock, sometimes too happy, as if I were drugged or in a dream. Do you know what I mean? As if nothing there was quite real."

M. de Vernon, who was a practical and a contented man, raised his eyebrows and said good-humouredly that he was afraid he did not understand Jenny's meaning, and the girl sighed and turned away.

To pick up the conversation and to cover up what he felt to be his own lack of understanding, M. de Vernon continued:

"You will need to have a little patience with her, you know, Jenny; she is really very strange in her ways. Do you know what she did as soon as she got the introduction from myself and your mother to all the old friends of her family? Why, she wrote round to them all for cast-off clothes, declaring her straits. Now she has trunk after trunk of dresses and garments that she alters herself with the greatest skill and zest. You must allow her to cook some of her favourite dishes, too, when she gets to Sherlock. She is almost a cordon bleu."

"I'm glad she is coming to Sherlock. I think she will be a great acquisition. She is So cheerful and amusing, she will be excellent company for Mother, for you know, Uncle Charles, that darling Mother is rather indolent and apt to fall into melancholy. Where does she live—I mean Aunt Beardie—now?"

"Well, she has had for some years, I believe, a room in Versailles. I should think it must be the oddest place, for she employs no servants and she has collected there all her treasures,—things she has bought here and there. I should not be surprised," added M. de Vernon, "if Mlle de Saint-Alde makes her permanent home in England."

"Yes, she might have the Dower House," said Jenny carelessly. "A Mrs. Perry lived there, but she left suddenly, I never knew why. It's quite near, and how pleasant that would be for Mother, if Father would consent."

M. de Vernon then asked Jenny about her approaching marriage, and a slight cloud passed over the young girl's face. She admitted that she had not thought of Frank Quarry much while she had been in Paris.

"No, you seem more occupied with poor Aunt Beardie," smiled her uncle. "Has Sir Francis an appointment yet?"

"Oh, I don't know. There was talk of Constantinople, Bucharest, and of his being a Resident. Oh, Uncle Charles, I don't want to go abroad. If I can't stay at Sherlock I'd rather live in Paris."

"You should have betrothed yourself to a Frenchman," said M. de Vernon. "I've always been rather puzzled about this engagement of yours, Jenny. You seem to be entering into it to please your parents. But why? There's no need for the marriage yet. You are young, you are intelligent, you want to see the world. Oh, I've no doubt that Frank is everything that is correct."

"He is indeed," said Jenny earnestly; "there's nothing to be said against Frank."

"Perhaps that's the trouble—too dull, eh? An English fox hunting squire."

"Uncle Charles, that's not fair. You're seen Frank, you know he's not that. I can't tell you why it is, but Mother seems anxious that I should be settled, even anxious that I should go away. And Frank was always there, and fond of me, and I've known him since was a child. And oh, Uncle Charles, I do admire and like him."

M. de Vernon noted that she did not use the word 'love,' and he said no more on the subject. He was a man who allowed women their whims, their caprices; and sometimes even their mysteries, and so he put out of his mind, so pleasantly occupied with his own satisfactory affairs, the puzzle of why Lady Sherlock was so eager for her daughter to marry Sir Francis Quarry and to leave England. Truly a puzzle, seeing how deep and unusual an attachment existed between mother and daughter.

Leaving her uncle, Jenny ran upstairs with a light foot and a light heart to find Clarisse, the French maid, who had proved very unsatisfactory, to ask her how far she had progressed in the packing of the pretty clothes that Lady Sherlock and her daughter had bought in Paris. The girl was there—for a wonder, Jenny thought, in the closet with piles of delicate clothing around her and a discontented expression on her face as she tossed gloves and stockings into heaps.

"Pray make haste, Clarisse," said Jenny. "You know we are leaving Paris at midday tomorrow." Then she asked where Lockwood was. Clarisse shrugged and did not know. She was a temporary maid, all M. de Vernon's servants being

engaged with their own work, so Jenny took no more trouble with her and went into her mother's apartment. There everything was ready, for Lockwood was expert and quick; but Lady Sherlock was not there, and the English servant, Jenny thought, looked a little anxious.

She was standing at the window holding back the two curtains, the yellow silk and the frilled muslin, and looking down into the narrow dark street. Twilight had closed in over Paris, the houses were in shadow and only a faint light in the upper air marked the presence of the setting sun.

"Where is Lady Sherlock?" asked Jenny. She picked up a tartan scarf from the bed; they had bought it yesterday in the Palais-Royal; curious to buy a Scotch plaid in Paris...the silk was rich and had a fine gloss, and Jenny, tiptoeing in her pretty blue laced sandals, flung the scarf round her shoulders and glanced at herself in the tall mirror set beside her mother's bed.

"She went out some time ago, miss. It's not like her ladyship to be away so long and leave no instructions."

"Went out by herself? While I was gossiping with Uncle Charles! Did she go with Aunt Beardie?"

"You mean the old French lady," reproved Lockwood severely. "Miss de Saint-Alde, Miss Jenny. 'Aunt Beardie' is an outlandish name. I can't think how my lord ever allowed his children to use it."

Jenny laughed, admiring innocently her reflection in the mirror.

"She liked it, poor old thing. She never had any children of her own, or any near relative, I'm afraid." Jenny checked herself, remembering the secret of Mlle de Saint-Alde's birth that had been confided to her. "It's all those old troubles, you know, Lockwood," she added hastily, "the Revolution! Oh, such terrible things must have happened. Think of how people have been wandering all over the Continent for a generation, unable to find their homes or their relatives, almost losing their identities."

"Yes, indeed, miss. I wonder some of them remember who they were, what they must have gone through. This lady seems very proper and prim."

"Oh, indeed she's not." Jenny laughed again, still admiring herself with the drapery of the Scotch scarf over her slender shoulders. "She loves a joke."

"Well, I don't think you should call her Aunt Beardie, miss. She's no relation of yours, anyhow. Though I suppose as she was your mother's companion," added the maid quickly, "she's of high birth?"

"Oh yes, she's of high birth, Lockwood, and the King's going to give her a pension and an apartment in one of the palaces. But all her troubles have made her rather strange, you know. She's only too delighted to be called Aunt Beardie, she says it's a mark of affection."

"Though she hasn't got a beard," protested Lockwood, "and I think it's a very ugly name to give a lady."

"She's got one or two hairs on her chin, like the pig in the nursery rhyme. She doesn't mind in the least that the children noticed it. Where has Mother gone, Lockwood?"

"That I couldn't say, miss, I was looking out of the window for her." The maid hesitated for a second, then added rather diffidently: "I think she might be in that church up the road."

"In the church!" Jenny was surprised, almost startled. She took the scarf from her shoulders and flung it on the bed. She had not known her mother to enter a Roman Catholic church before, indeed she seemed rather to avoid them.

"Yes, miss," said Lockwood, still between diffidence and defiance. "I thought perhaps you ought to know, her ladyship's been to church several times recently. I went after her once she was so late, and you were both of you engaged to go out to dine. She was kneeling, miss, in front of one of the side altars. She seemed startled to see me, almost as if she'd forgotten where she was. She never said anything to me about it, and perhaps I oughtn't to tell you, miss. But it's getting late, you'll have to be dressing for dinner, both of you, soon."

"I'll go after her," said Jenny earnestly. "Don't say anything about this to anyone, Lockwood. Poor Mother! Perhaps Mlle de Saint-Alde's return has reminded her of her childhood. You know she was educated as a Roman Catholic."

"Yes, miss, I know. Of course there's no harm in it, and it's the natural thing for her ladyship to do. But she's never done it before, and I've been in France with her several times, as you know, Miss Jenny."

"I'll go and see if she's there in the church."

Jenny went to her own room, put on her grey pelisse and slipped out of the house; she felt that she was fortunate in not being observed by anyone—then wondered why. Her errand was not secret.

A feeling of loneliness overcame her as she went up the long street. The air from which all the warm sunlight had disappeared seemed chill on her face, the houses looked dark and unfamiliar; she felt, as she had never felt before, an alien in this city of endless streets. But then she was, as she often reminded herself, half French. She could speak the language perfectly, her mother having spoken it with her since she was a little child. Yet she did feel a stranger and forlorn.

And when she reached the dark steps that led up to the formidable-looking façade and portal of the church, this sensation of depression increased. The building was in the heavy eighteenth-century style, darkened by city soot and grime, the monstrous weathered stone figures that rose above the heavy pediment of the porch loomed distorted and grotesque in the thickening shadows. The building had seemed to Jenny to have more the gloom of a prison than the lightness and radiance that should be associated with the house of God.

A blind and diseased beggar, crouching by the thick dirty leather mattress that fell in front of the inner door, whined for alms. Jenny had no money with her; with a half-whispered excuse she passed into the church.

The interior was dark and sombre, lit only by a few cheap guttering candles, which burned here and there before a shrine. So thick were the shadows, so sparse the lighting, that the walls of the building were not to be perceived. Jenny was enclosed in what seemed a dark and limitless world.

A thick perfume of stale incense hung in the tainted air, one or two black-shawled peasant women were kneeling on the rush-bottomed praying-chairs.

'Why should Mother have come here? It is like a tomb.'

She looked round, could not see Lady Sherlock, and anxious not to attract attention knelt on one of the coarse straw chairs, waiting until her eyes could become accustomed to the gloom when she could, in a natural manner, go down the church and glance at all the side altars.

Had her mother a patron saint? jenny did not know; Lady Sherlock had always been so reticent about all those things. Vivienne, there was no saint of

that name in the calendar. Jenny did not think so—but what was her mother's second name—Françoise, was it not? And there again, was there a Sainte-Françoise?

'I am being stupid. I wonder if it's because I'm a little frightened. And why should I be frightened?'

She put her bare hand over her face. Why had she been in such a hurry? There was nothing for her to be anxious about. She found herself shaping a little formal prayer that implored some God somewhere to be indulgent to her in some trouble, she did not know what.

Then more composed, but still feeling unaccountably depressed, she rose and walked very quietly down the church, the stone floor striking cold through the thin soles of her sandals; she supposed she was walking on. a vault where the dead lay buried and the reflection was not agreeable.

The first two side chapels were dark and empty, the third was lit by the flickering glow of a red lamp above the picture, of a tortured saint. Her mother was kneeling by the altar rail.

Jenny did not know her at first, for she wore a plain black shawl, the same in appearance as those that draped the shoulders of the peasant women. A black bonnet of the quality used by servants, hid her lovely pale hair and her veil was hanging over her face. But Jenny knew her, not only by the instinct of love but by the shoes she wore. These were new. Jenny had helped to buy them at the Palais-Royal yesterday, and she recognized at once the delicate grey gazelle-skin with the cut steel buttons; besides, there was her mother's reticule of white and azure beads hanging on her arm; besides again, there was no mistaking the grace and elegance of that figure even in the clumsy clothes. Jenny would, save for one reason, have gone at once and knelt beside her mother on the long stool and begged her to share her trouble and her loneliness. But the girl did not move, for Lady Sherlock was not alone.

A man was kneeling on the same praying-stool, so close that his hand, if he had put it out, could have touched Lady Sherlock's shoulder.

Jenny paused, then drew back, yet remained within sight of the chapel.

Was her mother so absorbed in some supplication or meditation that she had not noticed the stranger who was kneeling beside her?

Almost incredible, yet this seemed the only explanation of that odd juxtaposition.

Jenny could see the man pretty well, all but his face, that was completely hidden as he was gazing straight at the altar in front of him. He was well dressed, tall, yet had neither the appearance nor the clothes of a Parisian gentleman, and Jenny was quite sure she had never seen him before. His cloak was slightly old-fashioned and of the style worn by travellers; his riding-boots were drawn to his knees. On the stone floor of the chapel Jenny could see a hat and a pair of gloves, both shabby.

After a moment's reflection, Jenny decided to creep up to her mother, kneel beside her and gently attract her attention to the fact that she was not, as she must have supposed herself to be, alone in her devotions.

But she was checked by noticing that her mother and this stranger were talking together. Although they kept their faces directed in front of them, made no movement one to another, they were, in slow measured tones, conversing.

The effect of this discovery on Jenny was as if she had discovered something dreadful, noisome. She drew back with a sensation of repulsion rand alarm,

exceedingly bitter and impossible to explain. The next second she told herself that she had been a fool, that she was probably mistaken. How could she be sure of anything so delicate as that two people kneeling side by side were conversing without looking at each other? And even if they were, might there not be some reasonable explanation?

Perhaps this was some old acquaintance who had fallen on poverty, who was ashamed to present himself at the Hôtel de Vernon, and Lady Sherlock had chosen this tactful means of hearing his tale...Of course they would speak very low, so as not to disturb the sanctity of the church. Perhaps again they were both speaking their prayers aloud, each unconscious of the other.

As Jenny stood thus, wretchedly hesitant in the encumbering shadows, shivering in the pale air and enclosed damp of the church, Lady Sherlock rose suddenly and left the chapel. Her companion remained kneeling by the altar rail.

On seeing her daughter she lurched aside as if she were falling.

Jenny caught her arm through the thick shawl.

"Mother!" She tried to make her voice normal. "Lockwood said you might be here, and I came after you. It is getting late. Besides, you must change for dinner. Uncle Charles will be waiting. Remember, we are going to the Tuileries."

She spoke at foolish length, as she would have spoken to a child, in order to give Lady Sherlock time to recover. This her mother did almost at once. She had not removed the veil from her face, so jenny was not able to study her countenance. Now she pulled a handkerchief from her blue and white reticule and put it up under her veil and seemed to press it against her lips. Then, leaning on her daughter's arm as they left the church, she whispered:

"You will think me very strange, Jenny, but I've been recalling the old days. I suppose you guessed that. Perhaps Lockwood told you that I've come here before. Don't mention it to your father, but I have felt homesick. I wanted to say a few prayers to some of my childhood saints before I returned to England that is not really my home, you know."

"Why, yes, Mother, of course. It's quite reasonable. I should not have followed you, I suppose, but I had a sudden sense—how foolish of me!—almost of panic. I thought you might be lost, or ill, or hurt."

"You felt that, did you, Jenny? A sense of panic?"

They came out into the open air and Lady Sherlock paused to empty all the coins in her reticule into the blind beggar's lap.

"Mother! There's gold in that money! It's not like you—" She checked herself. Why should she blame her mother's prodigality? "Forgive me, Mother."

"Darling Jenny! Were you anxious for me?" Lady Sherlock's eyes gleamed behind the thick veil. "I tell you it was only a whim. You mustn't love me so much, Jenny, it hurts. You mustn't watch me so closely—that hurts too. You might"—and she laughed nervously—"find me doing something of which you disapproved. I might be at some rendezvous. But not in a church, Jenny."

"Mother, don't talk like that, even in jest. I wish I hadn't come, it seems like spying on you."

"Spying on me, Jenny! But, of course, you'd never do that. Besides, what is there to spy on?"

"Why, of course, Mother. I shouldn't have said spy. I'm tired myself, I suppose, and use clumsy words. Let us make haste. We don't want questions asked as to why we are late. Clarisse is rather tiresome over the packing. I don't

think she's at all experienced. When we come to Paris again we must have another maid. Wouldn't you like a French maid to take back to Sherlock, Mother?"

Jenny chattered all manner of nonsense, any triviality that came into her mind as the two women went the short distance along the dark streets from the church to the Hôtel de Vernon.

But at the back of her mind Jenny had one thought only—the stranger kneeling beside her mother. Had Lady Sherlock noticed him? Why had she not mentioned him? Would it be better to say nothing? What good would it do to speak? But the tormenting curiosity must somehow be eased.

As they reached the door of the hôtel, jenny, whom her mother was scolding for having come out alone so late and unescorted, said:

"Mother, who was sharing your devotions? That man who was kneeling beside you?" Then, as if to excuse herself, she added swiftly: "I thought it so discourteous of him to kneel there while you were praying. I suppose you were there first?"

"The man who was beside me?" asked Lady Sherlock. She paused in the vestibule; Jenny thought she was going to say she had not noticed the stranger. Then she added: "Oh yes, he did come in after me. He was very polite. He said that he always put up a prayer at that hour for someone who was dead and dear to him, and always in that chapel. And he asked if he might kneel there for a few moments, and if he would disturb me. I replied it was no matter to me."

"Why, of course," agreed Jenny, too readily. She tried to dismiss the episode from her mind, but she could not rid herself of that sense of shame she had felt on seeing her mother and the tall dark man in his old-fashioned riding-cloak kneeling side by side. She had not seen his face, but she would know him again, certainly if he wore those clothes. She remembered the steel-blue colour of the coat lined with a faded scarlet and frogged with fraying black braid. The hair, too, very dark brown and crisply cut—touched with grey or powder. But how foolish of her to fix these details in her mind! What importance could this stranger ever have for her? She turned impulsively to her mother as the two women reached Lady Sherlock's bedroom, and clasping her arms, said: "Mother, I wish you'd come to me instead of going to the church when you're sad or troubled. Won't you tell me if there's anything, anything in the world, that I can do? You know that I love you and that I want to stay with you always. Why, since I've been here in Paris with you I've forgotten all else, even about Frank."

Lady Sherlock unfastened her bonnet and flung it on a chair. She had not looked well for several days, Jenny had thought. It was the heat, perhaps, and the constant activity, going to so many receptions, dinners—a life so different from that she lived at Sherlock; she no longer had that air of fading youth she had kept so long—age was in her face. She took her daughter by the shoulders, and gazing at her earnestly, said:

"Jenny, you must marry Frank. Don't think of putting off your marriage. I know what I'm talking about and I'm speaking because I love you too, Jenny. You mustn't delay. This is an unnatural life. A girl shouldn't remain so long with her parents, enclosed as you live at Sherlock. Or perhaps would you like to go and stay with your Uncle Charles?" Her face softened with eagerness, relief at this thought. "Frank wouldn't mind, I know."

"Mother, you speak as if you wanted to get rid of me. Of course I love Uncle Charles, and Frank too, but I want to be with you. After all, I'm only eighteen, I suppose I haven't quite made up my mind yet. Mother, do tell me why you're so serious. Is anything wrong, has anything disturbed you? I thought you'd be so happy when Mlle de Saint-Alde returned."

"Of course I am." Lady Sherlock turned away quickly. "Better send Clarisse for Lockwood. I'll put on my gold satin dress tonight—yes, with the purple silk shawl and fringes."

She ran over the names of the guests, members of some of the finest families in France. "They'll all be here, won't they, and they'll expect to see me looking—well, at my best, my poor best now! Jenny, I'm quite faded, all my lustre's gone."

"Mother, you're beautiful! You never will be anything but beautiful."

"Jenny, don't talk like that."

The girl flung herself on her knees beside her mother, who was seated on a brocade stool in front of the silk-draped dressing-table; resting her elbows on the lace cover she gazed into the three-fold mirror that reflected her face from three different angles, and Jenny, looking up from her mother's knee, saw her profile repeated in different attitudes of grace; lovely yet, but blurred and withered with the first frost of the years.

Lady Sherlock recovered her spirits, or seemed to do so, for Jenny suspected that she was putting a restraint on herself while Lockwood brought out the golden dress that glittered like a louis d'or, and the purple shawl, by far the most superb costume that Jenny had ever seen her wear.

"Is Mlle de Saint-Alde coming tonight, Mother?" asked Jenny, feeling that the mention of her old friend would perhaps distract her mother from that inner uneasiness that her assumed gaiety could not disguise from her watchful daughter.

"Mlle de Saint-Alde! Poor Aunt Beardie!" Lady Sherlock laughed. "No, I don't think so. She would be rather a memento mori, would she not, Jenny, at a formal dinner-party. Poor Estienne! How she has changed!"

"I suppose, Mother, she hardly seems like the girl you loved so long ago?"

"Indeed, no! She seems like a stranger. I should hardly believe she was the same person."

"I like her. She is amusing. And one feels so sorry for her. Mother, Uncle Charles told me why it is she can't claim her father's fortune. You never knew that, did you, Mother? I suppose as a girl they didn't tell you those things, in those days, at least."

"What do you mean, Jenny?" Lady Sherlock paused with the thin scarf in her pale hand.

"Well, I mean that M. de Saint-Alde was not married to her mother," said Jenny.

"Oh! No, I didn't know. I think I did, afterwards. Something came up about the family. It's all confused, and I don't like to talk about it, Jenny. Of course, it does not make much difference now. She'll get her pension just the same. But she can't claim the debt from His Majesty, I suppose."

"Do you think she'll stay long in England, Mother? I thought she might have the Dower House now that Mrs. Perry's gone."

"I don't think your father would care for that, Jenny," replied Lady Sherlock. "Besides, I don't think Aunt Beardie—Tante Barbe—what shall I call her? Mlle de Saint-Alde? Estienne?"

"Call her Aunt Beardie," laughed Jenny. "She likes the name, she says it makes her feel like someone out of Madame d'Aulnoy's fairy-tales."

"Well, I don't think she'd care to live in England, Jenny. She's got her own rooms in Versailles and she's going to be offered apartments in the château there."

"No one would want to live in that huge palace," protested Jenny with a grimace. "If she's quaint in her ways now, what will she be like after she's been there for a few months?"

"Oh, Jenny, how you chatter! I'm tired already, and there's this dinner and all those people to entertain. My head aches."

"You look weary, Mother. Come, shall I say you're not well and can't go down?"

"No," said Lady Sherlock, "I won't be a coward. I've got to face it."

And Jenny thought she put a strange emphasis on these words considering how trivial were the matters to which they referred.

Aunt Beardie confessed she was very excited at the prospect of the trip to England. She paid several visits to the Hôtel de Vernon and was always full of good-humoured jests and anecdotes. She brought little presents made by her own hand for all the servants—knitted silk purses for the men and little lapels or caps for the women. She declared that she felt she owed a token of gratitude to every member of M. de Vernon's establishment in acknowledgment of her delightful visit to the château in Brittany and the hospitality she had enjoyed at the Paris hôtel.

Not, she declared, to incommode her good friends, she had hired her own diligence, and in this, without servants and with a large quantity of luggage, she followed Lady Sherlock's equipage to Le Havre. She was very careful, and Jenny thought this rather touching, to pay all her own expenses, refusing even to accept any portion of their comforts without offering her share.

The winds were contrary and the sea sluggish during the passage, but Aunt Beardie was an entertaining and witty companion. She had some small knowledge of English, which she was constantly trying to improve, and insisted on giving Ann Lockwood a substantial fee for what she termed 'lessons.'

In this way was the tiresome journey from Paris to Sherlock Hall beguiled, and it was on the bright afternoon of an August day that Estienne de Saint-Alde arrived at the old house that had been now for so many years her friend's home.

As she stepped out of the family carriage that Sir Robert had sent to meet the ladies at Plymouth, she looked round her eagerly, then exclaimed rapidly in French:

"What a beautiful place! How happy you must, all be here! How happy I am to have come here!"

"Yes," replied Lady Sherlock in the same language, as she too descended from the carriage, "it is strange, is it not, that we should both be here. And, as you say—happy."

"Well," said Jenny, wanting to take anything formal or sad from this homecoming, "everything in life is strange, is it not, Mother, if one looks at it in

that way? After all, in another sense, it is quite natural that your old friends should come to your home."

"I want to see the children," announced Aunt Beardie, standing erect under the classic portico, "and your good husband. Perhaps he will not be so pleased to see me, but I have tact and discretion and shall not be officious and put myself in the way."

"I told Robert I was bringing you," said Lady Sherlock, "he will of course welcome you."

She passed into the house, Jenny and Aunt Beardie standing under the portico, full in the glow of the slanting sunbeams; if Aunt Beardie had seemed a strange figure in Paris she looked more so, indeed, against this placid aristocratic English scene. Her ill-fitting gown of a bright petunia-coloured satin appeared harsh in the pure summer sunshine, her huge black bonnet with vivid green ribbons and the ruche of white lace close round her harsh features gave her an old-fashioned, formidable appearance.

The details of her costume were ill-chosen with the capricious lack of taste of an eccentric and fussy, ageing woman; she wore mittens adorned with steel beads, several bags of varying sizes hung from her wrist and waist. She had carried, although she had travelled a long way in a closed carriage, a large parasol of black and white taffeta silk, and a shawl of thick cream-coloured Andalusian patterned with scarlet was wrapped over her gaunt shoulders.

For the first time Jenny began to wonder and with dismay what her father would think of this curious visitor, and if the children, perhaps, would not find the odd stranger ridiculous or even terrifying.

Never before had the word 'terrifying' come into Jenny's head in connection with Mlle de Saint-Alde, but it came now, and she thought that if she had seen this queer creature some years ago, when she had been a child of Bobby's age, she might have been alarmed by Aunt Beardie and thought her what she had laughingly called her, a witch or an ogress out of one of the fairy-tales that Jenny used to read on a winter's evening.

But it was absurd to allow herself to think like that. Poor Aunt Beardie was good—humoured, anxious only to please, eager for affection. Jenny thought, as she conducted the old lady into the house: 'I wonder if Mother really wants her to stay long. Is it perhaps a pity that she ever came back into Mother's life?'

Then Sir Robert was on the step to greet his wife, his daughter and their guest. He performed the honours with a gracious if sober courtesy, and it was not until Lady Sherlock had taken Aunt Beardie to the rooms that had been prepared for her that Sir Robert said to Jenny, rather sharply:

"That's a very peculiar old lady, my dear. Is it possible that the beautiful little creature whose portrait your mother showed me once has grown into such a coarse, ugly woman?" Jenny laughed nervously.

"I think that's unkind, Father. She's quite handsome really. You know the poor creature's had a very adventurous life."

"Yes, I suppose so; I know the tale, but I hear the King has given her a pension and rooms in Versailles. Why did she not remain in France?"

Sir Robert did not seem altogether pleased that Aunt Beardie had taken up her residence in Sherlock Hall, and Jenny explained the case so far as she knew it. She found herself, rather to her own surprise, pleading for Aunt Beardie, her loneliness, her peculiar position, the reserve and pride that had

made her keep herself hidden for so long, until Sir Robert stopped her by kindly patting her hand and saying:

"As long as your mother's happy to have this old friend with her, you don't suppose I shall object, do you, Jenny? You're a good-hearted girl. And what about Frank? He says you've scarcely written to him while you've been away. He'll be here any moment now."

"Of course I shall be glad to see Frank, Father," smiled Jenny. Then to change the subject she began relating some of the pleasant trivialities that had happened to them in Paris, the visits exchanged, the Court gossip they had heard from Uncle Charles, news of people—many of them known, at least by name, to Sir Robert—whom they had met in Paris, the message from Hélène and her children. But Jenny did not mention the one thing she remembered vividly—her mother kneeling by that stranger's side in the dark church of Saint-Roch.

Sir Robert liked to hear his daughter chatter away, as he thought, so happily, and smiled kindly on her budget of pleasant news.

"Well, child, I'm glad you have enjoyed yourself. Now I must go up to see your mother. I thought she looked tired. I would not intrude on her at first, but perhaps she is rested now."

"Oh yes, Father, she wants to see you, I know. She has brought you several little things and of course others—too many, I fear—for the children. Aunt Beardie says she is spoiling them as she spoils all of us."

When Sir Robert left the room Jenny idly pulled the curtains aside and looked out on the dear, familiar scene.

Aunt Beardie had soon made herself at home; Jenny could see the vivid flash of her bright-coloured skirts as she moved down the alley with Fanny and Bobby by her side.

When Sir Francis Quarry urged Jenny once more to fix the date of their marriage for October, the girl was surprised to find that she was eager to agree, so surprised that she was silent and did not reply to the young man's rather halting but wistful and sincere pleading.

Jenny knew that this change in her feelings was not due to any increase in her affection for Sir Francis. Indeed she looked at him, not with distaste, but as it seemed to her, from a little farther off, as if she had moved away from him. The edge of her admiration for him, for what he stood for, for his possible future achievements had been blunted; she seemed to be absorbed in something, she did not know what, that set him apart from her, yet she was eager for this chance of escape...

She brought her mind quickly to a check at the word 'escape.'

She heard him say: "Jenny, can't you make up your mind?" and shook her head, still without replying, still astonished at her own feelings; she heard him say: "Jenny, you can leave your mother now—she has Mlle de Saint-Alde to keep her company."

The young man, honest, straightforward and conventional, had always been secretly and rather unwillingly impatient of the devotion between Jenny and Lady Sherlock. It seemed to him a little unnatural and therefore not to be encouraged, for he was a man who intensely disliked the abnormal. He really loved Jenny, not with any passing fancy or any transient desire, but with a steady affection touched with passion that had grown since he had first seen

her as a child four years of age on a white pony on his returning home from Eton.

There were ten years or more between them and that gave his love for Jenny a protective quality; she pleased his tastes as well as his senses; she was, although unusual, so well-bred, so correct. She would make a very gracious and beautiful Ambassador's wife—and he meant to be an Ambassador... He had before his eyes the goal of Paris or Rome, perhaps a place in the Cabinet.

It was true she had easily consented to marry him, too easily, he thought, for her acquiescence had seemed touched with indifference, and his slight resentment of Lady Sherlock's possessiveness, as he termed it, was not lessened by the fact that it was she who had urged Jenny to accept him. Of late, too, Sir Francis thought; Lady Sherlock's behaviour had been erratic. Why had she so suddenly and unexpectedly gone to Paris, taking the girl with her? And surely it was some problem to do with Lady Sherlock that was making Jenny hesitant now? At length, in an effort to pierce her reserve, he said:

"If you wish, Jenny, I'll give up diplomacy and stay here, at home. Why not? There's plenty to do, even for an active and energetic young man."

"Oh no, Frank," she replied at once, and quickly. "Diplomacy is your life, your chosen career—I mustn't interfere with that. Do you know, when you spoke just now I felt glad, and then I was wondering why I felt glad. That's what held me silent."

She looked at him steadily, as if she hoped to find an answer in his face.

"Why, Jenny," he exclaimed, greatly relieved and pleased, "perhaps it is because you are beginning to care for me a little more. You never cared for me quite enough, you know, not as I wished."

"It was not that, Frank," she said honestly. "I like you just the same, better than anyone else—no more—yet."

"Well, I shall have to be content with that," he smiled away his resentment; "it's poor comfort, you know, Jenny."

"It may be. But I'll make, I think, a good, faithful wife when I marry. But, Frank, it wasn't anything to do with you, but because I wanted to escape. Frank, why does Mother keep urging me to go away?"

"I do not know. I wondered myself. You see, Jenny, with your beauty and your birth, the connections you have in France, you might make a much better match than with me. And your mother is not so fond of me. I do not think, somehow, she even likes me a great deal. Yet I believe that in a way she trusts me. Yes, it's that. She trusts me with you and wants me to take you away."

"I felt that, too, but I can't think why. The strange part of it is, Frank, that just now I felt it myself. I felt I wanted to get away from Sherlock, from the country round here, from everything."

"It's some whim, some caprice, Jenny, and I don't want to take advantage of it."

"I wouldn't take advantage of it myself," said the girl quickly. "Indeed, it would make me refuse you, Frank. It's like a warning of danger, and I was never one to run away from danger. If there's any danger here it must be to Mother, and I must stay and face it."

"That's absurd, Jenny darling!" It was exasperating and to his cool, clear mind piteous that a girl so charming, so well bred, so intelligent as Jenny, should be affected by these whims, caprices, perhaps delusions.

"Could there be anyone," he argued, "better protected, happier, than Lady Sherlock, who is adored by her husband, her children, her servants? Her brother and his family are delighted to receive her in France. I know she had a terrible experience in the revolutionary time and was exiled in Hamburg."

"I think it might have to do with that," interrupted Jenny thoughtfully, "I do not know."

Then Sir Frank urged, to conclude his argument:

"Well, the worst of that has gone now. I always understood her great grief was for the death of Mlle de Saint-Alde, and now that lady has returned, as from the dead, to comfort her—"

"Yes, from the dead," whispered Jenny. "Perhaps that's terrible. Don't you think she may be—different from what Mother expected?"

"No. My dear child, it's thirty years or more, and the most charming young girl can turn into the craziest old lady. Of course, your mother is beautiful; but then, Lady Sherlock is most uncommon. And Mlle de Saint-Alde is quite delightful, amusing, witty, charming. I hear she has taken the Dower House."

"Yes, Mother wants to give it to her, but she insists on paying Father for it. She has moved in with all her trunks and has sent to France for others. I suppose she is here permanently now. She says she will go with us to France whenever we go. I don't think she'll stay here long—she's restless, you know."

"She's certainly rather unusual in her dress, but, as I said, delightful in her behaviour. And she belongs to a family that's much respected. I hope His French Majesty is repaying her services."

Jenny glanced at Sir Frank. Perhaps he had not heard of the bar sinister across poor Mlle de Saint-Alde's coat-of-arms? She said:

"Oh, yes. Mother and my Uncle Charles have done all they could. She has been granted a pension and the revenue of the post-office at Versailles. Rooms in the Château, too, when she cares to go there. She says her great wish is not so much for money as for respect and affection."

"Well, Jenny, there she is, and I think your mother must be much happier to know she is there. She must have got used to her strangeness by now. And there are her memories—"

"Yes, I often hear her say that to Mother, remind her, sometimes putting her arm round her shoulders—'Dearest Vivienne, think of all our memories. Think of those days in Hamburg and what we went through together.' Mother laughs and seems pleased; yet underneath, Frank, I feel that she winces—"

"Well, my dearest Jenny, my anxious child, we are getting a long way from the question of our marriage. Will you, or will you not, fix our wedding day for October? I am at your service. I think I shall be offered Constantinople."

"Constantinople! That is a long way off!" It seemed again to Jenny as if a door was suddenly opened to her to escape from peril. She said: "Forgive me, Frank! I feel as if I were bound to—I know not what loyalty, consecrated to—I know not what duty. Don't think those words high-flown, it's so difficult to express what I feel. I'm dedicated to something."

"To me, I hope, my charming Jenny."

"Frank, I don't want to deceive you. You seem even further away than you were before. Will you wait a little, or let me go altogether? Perhaps that would be better for us both. Let me go altogether, Frank. Find another woman."

"Jenny, I cannot. You've got my heart; it's gone too far with me to stop."

"Then, Frank, you must wait. I want to see what's going to happen. I have a premonition of—evil."

"Jenny, don't get those ideas into your head. You know what they mean—all manner of delusions—"

Jenny interrupted him, answering him straight.

"I am what I am, Frank; I cannot pretend."

There was a dignity and resolution about her that held him silent. He himself, strong-minded and free from folly as he prided himself on being, was a little affected by her mood, by her decision.

The scene, so pleasant and familiar—the drawing-room with the plumed birds in colours of dark prune and acid green painted on the walls, the windows opening on the terrace where stood the large stone vases of bright flowers and the agaves above the baluster—all these things were slightly tainted with a sinister darkness, like the landscape before the coming of a thunderstorm when the sunshine is slowly withdrawn and the colour is left but not the light, the fresh leaves and the brilliant flowers show lurid against the unnaturally gloomy background.

The young man threw off this feeling, annoyed with himself for so far surrendering to what he felt was the young girl's whim. He could not prolong his farewells any longer, his equipage was waiting for him at the door of Quarry Hall. He was going to London on his own ambitious business, leaving Jenny for a while at least.

At that moment Sir Frank who, like most people born to good fortune, was selfish as well as high-spirited and intent on his own way, was almost sorry that his feelings were so involved with Geneviève Sherlock—a strange creature after all, and he was not a man who approved of strange creatures! But she was Jenny, and he loved her.

So he kissed her hand; trying once more to to persuade her to fix the date of the wedding for October and to write to him often. She promised him civilly and kindly, but he felt her thoughts were far away, almost as if he had lost her already.

'A strange position,' he thought, as he mounted his horse and rode slowly away down the avenue that led from Sherlock Manor House to the iron gates where the two stone griffins crowned the twin pillars either side of the broad straight road.

'I do not much like Lady Sherlock, nor do I think she likes me, yet she is bringing all her influence to bear to force Jenny to marry me. And if it was not for this woman, who, as I think, is inimical to me, and for whom I certainly have no great friendship, Jenny would have refused me at once.'

The problem this situation presented was too much for the puzzled young man to attempt to solve; he had to put it out of his mind, for the dusk was closing in; he had stayed longer than he had intended, and he'd pleaded, perhaps, more fervently than he had intended, for Sir Frank Quarry put a high value on himself. In rank and in possessions he was superior to the man whose daughter he was wooing; he also faintly despised Sir Robert Sherlock as a bucolic country squire.

So he laughed with a little faint self-scorn as he skid to himself, turning the chestnut mare's head along the strip of high road white in the gathering gloom: 'I suppose I'm in love and must take what comes of it.' It was not altogether

pleasant to his self-esteem for him to realize what he would sacrifice in order to win Jenny Sherlock.

When her lover had left, Jenny completely forgot him; she was entirely occupied with the puzzle of her own feelings.

Everything about her seemed slightly warped, distorted. This was not only a spiritual sensation but physical. She had thought as she approached the Dower House the other day that the outline was crooked and that masses of formidable shadows lurked in the corners of the gardens that had once been to her sweet in every aspect.

She would start in front of mirrors set in silent places, when she suddenly saw her own face, as if she expected another face to look over her shoulder.

There were masks that, tied with fluttering ribbons, held up the swags of fruit that were carved in the stone facings of Sherlock Manor House; Jenny had looked at these before with a certain pleasure in the clear symmetry of their design, but the other day she caught herself glancing at them with a sudden distrust. This fear had been justified; the stone lips seemed curved in mockery, the hollow eyes held a steady menace.

She had grown to be afraid of silence, and listened intently for familiar domestic noises—the servants talking from their quarters, sounds of water being poured, the drone that came from the schoolroom in Bobby's and Fanny's sweet treble voices. She sought the company of Mr. West and Miss Prescott, and she had—and this was worst of all—to endeavour to leave her mother alone. At one time, without any thought at all, she had kept close to this beloved companion, always certain, without even thinking about it, of her welcome. But now she found herself wondering—'Does Mother want me? Would she rather be alone?'

It was not that there was any question of her intruding between her mother and the friend who had been so miraculously recovered, for Mlle de Saint-Alde always welcomed Jenny heartily, begging her to make a third in all their parties, at conversation, at cards, or at needlework, in their games and cookery lessons.

But when Lady Sherlock was by herself and Jenny came upon her in her own sitting-room, in the quincunx of limes, in any place where she might sit at ease and muse, Jenny had the feeling that she should creep away and not intrude. The girl tried to put this sensation down to the fact that she had, unaware, eavesdropped on her mother in the church of Saint-Roch, for at the bottom of her heart she had never believed Lady Sherlock's explanation of the stranger, kneeling beside her in the red-lit gloom.

'Yes,' thought Jenny, in a distracted moment, 'that must be at the bottom of it. I spied on Mother and she knew it, and now, whenever I come upon her, she thinks I am spying again, and that makes me self-conscious and I want to creep away.'

Yet she wished to see her mother now to discuss with her the ever-recurrent question of the marriage in October; but she restrained herself, when the opportunity came, and she believed she had heard Lady Sherlock go upstairs to her room, the little room at the back of the house that she had furnished soon after her marriage from furniture and tapestries sent by M. de Vernon from Brittany.

'I'll go out,' thought Jenny. 'There's still an hour before dinner. I must not see the children either; Miss Prescott will begin to notice that I am always joining them. She will think there's something strange about me.'

The girl was alarmed by the state of her mind. Nothing was wrong, nothing had happened, and yet she seemed to be drawn into a maze of unreal terrors.

She was sorry that Frank had gone, that she had let him go so easily. He was strong, honest, wholesome, and really loved her. Why think of that word—wholesome? Jenny bit her lip... She felt like a traveller in an unknown country where the flowers were perfumed, the leaves were bright, and the sun was clear, yet where the prudent voyager knew every step might rouse a sleeping snake.

The evening was warm. She took her lace scarf from a chair and stepped out on to the terrace.

This dear house, the dearly beloved landscape! She put her hands on the balustrade between the pots of acanthus; the stone was still warm from the heat of the long summer day. She ran down the steps on to the smooth lawn, trying to recapture the gaiety of her childhood, trying to remember nothing but the joy of those days before... Before what? Why, only before this last visit to Paris they had all been quite happy then, save sometimes when her mother would be moody and would go upstairs, unlock the press and take out those papers—those relics of her childhood—and the little pencil portrait of Estienne de Saint-Alde.

Jenny, as people will when intensely absorbed in some brooding thought, walked farther than she had intended: She realized suddenly that it was almost dark. There was a rising moon, however, and she was not alarmed so well lit were both the gardens and the park by the cold white glow.

She had come, without thinking, to the Dower House. This was older than the Manor House and had never been modernized; the twisted Tudor chimney stacks rose up blackly in outline against the sky, pale as won, silver and only faintly washed with a fading blue.

There were no lights in any of the windows, save a single, upper one. Perhaps that was Mlle de Saint-Alde's bedroom.

Jenny paused, gazing up at that light which filtered between two curtains not quite drawn in the centre.

She thought of this queer old woman—what a curious life she had had, and how strange it must seem to her now, sheltered in this severe old house in England. It was strange of Aunt Beardie to refuse all servants, to live there alone, with only a village woman to come in now and then.

What did she do there all day? After all, it was only a few hours of the twenty-four that Aunt Beardie spent at Sherlock Manor House. She never seemed to go abroad, she would not keep a carriage. Sometimes she went out with the Sherlocks, but not very often. She liked to do little services for other people, to find servants, run errands, make purchases, look for houses. But there was not very much scope for these activities in Sherlock.

Jenny, drawing her thin smooth shawl close around her, for the night seemed suddenly cold, wondered what the old woman did when she returned to that ancient house, so much too large for her, alone, and sat there with her memories of the bitter past. 'She is like a flower without a root or a blossom,' thought Jenny. 'It is pitiful. She doesn't really belong to her family, she has had all those horrible experiences, she has never married and has no children. And

there she is alone, a foreigner, alien to all this, for we are all real, strangers to her. What does she think of when she puts the light out?'

Jenny gazed at the dark crooked outline of the Dower House—yes, it looked crooked, the entire building, not the chimneys only in that light. Jenny felt for the first time that the appearance of Aunt Beardie had not altogether been a happy event; perhaps it would have been better if this remarkable old woman had never come forward, but had lived out alone her life that was twisted as the house in which she had now found refuge.

'What's coming over me? I must go back! I shall be late for dinner and Mother will be wondering... Poor Mother, she is always so alarmed if I am only a few Minutes late. As if anything could happen to me here.'

She turned aside and decided that in order to be quicker she would cut across the parkland and through a grove of oak saplings that Sir Robert was growing to replenish the great trees in the park that fell one by one in the winter storms.

When she reached this little plantation she was surprised to see ahead of her two figures, both dark in the heavy twilight, walking slowly. The woman wore a long shawl, the ends of which trailed on the ground, and a cloth tied over her head; both were of some colour that lost all brilliancy in this twilight.

A light cloud passed over the rising moon, and jenny wondered who was walking in the park at this hour. Two of the servants, perhaps? But the woman had not the carriage of a servant. The man was tall and wore a travelling-coat and his hat was pulled down very low on his head, making his neck appear exceptionally short.

Jenny put her hand to her mouth. She knew this was her mother. She debated now, as she had debated in the church of Saint-Roch, if she should go away—no, run away—or if she should go up and speak to her mother, or whether she should—yes, that was the word—spy on her...

'It's the same man,' she thought, 'here in England. It is incredible. Mother, out with him alone secretly, at night!'

She looked down at her own gown; that was dark, too—a midnight blue that had brightness by daylight, but now blended into the shadows.

The two figures were walking with tedious slowness, as if they were debating something with great earnestness, along the path that traversed the plantation; Jenny kept time with this pace, creeping among the trees; overhead the birds were twittering loudly as in dark flocks of small flying wings they returned to their nests in the shivering leaves of the young trees.

The girl slipped the shawl, which was white, off her shoulders, although her flesh winced in the chill air, and held it behind her back. Drawing her skirts closely round her with the same hand, she contrived to reach within a few yards of the figures, treading slowly, putting her feet down with the infinite care of a cat after its prey.

Yes, it was her mother, no doubt about it; no other woman had that graceful line, that dignified carriage.

And the man? The moon slipped from behind the cloud, a faint misty light gleamed upon his thick dark hair, crisply cut and upturned and grey at the tips; Jenny was convinced that it was the man whom she had seen in Saint-Roch.

'I came out here that I might not disturb Mother, and now I find myself eavesdropping. But I must know something about this man. I believe it is something dreadful that she won't tell me.'

The little grove came to an end in a clearing of trees that had been cut down the year before. The ground had been covered with anemones and primroses; these had now ceased to flower, and nothing but a few ferns rose up between the smooth-sawn surfaces of the tree-stumps waiting to be uprooted.

Lady Sherlock, for Jenny had no doubt it was her mother at whom she looked, suddenly sank on one of these pale wooden discs; her companion remained standing beside her; Jenny was still behind them, moving through the foliage very carefully. She came within a few yards of the couple. They were talking, but she could not understand what they were saying, but now and then a higher syllable told her that they were using the French language and then she heard her mother say, in a slightly raised voice, the conventional words:

"Such wickedness cannot go unpunished."

Then the man, in a voice deep, melodious and carefully modulated, said:

"The terms are clear."

Lady Sherlock, still without moving and with her head bent and her gaze, Jenny thought, fixed on the handkerchief she was clenching in her hand (Jenny could see that in a blur of white on her knee), replied:

"I was not prepared for such disconcerting skill."

The deep-toned, attractive voice replied, slowly and without a trace of feeling:

"Skill must be shown on both sides. The least mistake will bring about a terrible result."

Then he moved, turned, and if she had not been so low and the shadow cast by the moon so intense, Jenny would have seen his face.

"Hush! I hear someone moving—someone there in the woods!" he warned his companion.

Lady Sherlock rose also; Jenny did not see her face, distorted by a look of agony, but heard her say:

"Impossible! We could not be followed here."

Agitated by terror and shame, Jenny withdrew into the wood; she must have made some noise and the man had heard her. Now, the fear of discovery lending her a desperate courage, she contrived to withdraw rapidly, keeping her head bent so that her face might not be seen in a chance gleam of the moon, and soon had hidden herself completely behind a screen of boughs and leaves. If she made a noise, treading on a stick or breaking a branch, the chatter of the birds overhead crowding into their nests with shrill tumult had surely concealed it.

What she had witnessed and heard combined into a shock like a blow over the heart to the girl. She hastened back to the house, not seeing, not knowing where she went, moving mechanically along the familiar ways. Only when she came to the terrace and saw the light in the window did she pause and remember that she must take some course of action—decide what to do.

Who was this man? How could he possibly be concealed in Sherlock? A Frenchman, whom she could swear her mother had been with in the church of Saint-Roch. She remembered the story of the man who had come to the 'Sherlock Arms' and who had asked all manner of questions about the family—M. Beyrolles. Was this he?

Her mind was in a torment of confusion. What tale to tell when she came home, how to conceal her agitation? She tried to tell herself that it was impossible, that it had not happened, that it had not been her mother whom she had seen in the clearing. She said to herself quite firmly: 'Of course I shall find Mother at home, wondering why I am late.'

Trying to fix this conviction in her mind she walked through the French windows into the dining-room. Sir Robert was there, and Miss Prescott and Mr. West, and she could have kissed them all for their familiar presence.

She stood on the threshold, staring at the scene as a drowning man may gaze on the land as he opens his eyes after a rescue, until Sir Robert said:

"Why, Jenny, what's the matter? You're late! We didn't wait any longer, we thought perhaps you were at the Dower House."

"Mother?" asked Jenny. "Is Mother home yet?"

"Your mother's in her room," said Sir Robert easily "Lockwood took her some dinner up there. She had one of her headaches."

"Can I go up and see her?" asked Jenny mechanically.

"No, my dear, I think you'd better not. She doesn't wish to be disturbed. What about your own dinner? Where have you been?"

"Your feet are wet, dear," said Miss Prescott. "Won't you take your slippers off?"

"I don't know what's happened to me," said Jenny; trying to speak naturally. "May I sit down as I am, Father, without changing?"

"Why, of course, my dear child."

Soon, with natural feminine duplicity, Jenny found her excuse and even became voluble.

"I was saying good-bye to Frank; he's gone away for a few weeks, you know, Father. And after he'd ridden away I thought, well, I'd been a little brusque perhaps, so I went into the woods to try and think the whole thing out and decide what I do really mean to do—about our betrothal, you know, Father, and the marriage in October."

The girl, always so deeply reserved, had never expressed herself before so clearly about her own affairs, and the people who listened to her were all mildly surprised that she should, before two dependents too, thus disclose herself.

But she seated herself at the table, after Miss Prescott had begged her to take off her sandals, and continued talking, with flushed cheeks and bright eyes, quite volubly of her engagement to Sir Francis Quarry.

Sir Robert, unsuspecting and not very subtle-minded, took her words at their face value as did Mr. West and Fanny—who had been allowed the last few months to stay up for dinner. But Miss Prescott thought that there was something false in the girl's frankness and that Sir Francis was only a decoy to draw away her audience from the subject in which she was vitally interested. And the governess, who really loved the girl, thought: 'I wonder what it is? Is there someone else whom she cares about? Did she meet someone in France? Poor Jenny! I do so want her to be happy.'

And behind her hollow words Jenny's thoughts were racing. 'She pretended she had a headache—she'd read of that so often in novels. She went upstairs and then she must have slipped out when no one was looking. How does the man communicate with her? Where is he staying? He must know this place very well to have got there behind the plantation. She made that the trysting-place. Poor Mother! Perhaps I am making a great deal of what is not of very

much importance. It may have some simple explanation. In that case, why did she not go to Father? The man is French. I wonder if I should ask Aunt Beardie? Perhaps she could help me. She's known Mother longer than I have—that's a curious thought!—longer than Father has, but I don't like to go to her. After all, she's only a stranger to me.'

Jenny felt a deep revulsion against betraying her mother to anyone, even to the kindly old woman who was so wise and experienced for all her startling ways.

Then there was Frank. He was absolutely to be trusted and she thought of him and of that fact with a rush of gratitude. She remembered, too, with a pang, that he had gone and there was no one else among their friends and acquaintances. She would have to solve this problem herself.

But what to do, how to set about it? How to help her mother, how to get into her mother's confidence? She would not dare to let her mother know that for a second time she had been spying, eavesdropping. What would be the use of saying, 'I didn't want to seem to be watching and that's why I didn't go up to your room'?

Lockwood! What part did Lockwood play? Did she really believe that her mistress was in bed? How did Lady Sherlock intend to return to the house?

Jenny remembered the little secret staircase (*l'escalier dérobé*) that had been the source of so much fun and so many mild adventures in their childhood, which ran down the side of the left wing of the house to a little postern door. It did not lead direct into Lady Sherlock's apartment, but into a small music room, not often used, that opened by a door into an alcove at the head of Lady Sherlock's bed. No doubt that was the way by which the unhappy woman—and by now Jenny so thought of her mother—had left the house and by which she intended to return to it—secretly.

By locking her bedroom door, even against Lockwood, she would be secure from interruption and even from suspicion. For Jenny remembered her mother's megrims, as they had been termed. She had had them a good number of years now and she always liked to keep quiet in darkness when thus afflicted. The family had long been used to this trouble, and to the remedy.

Yes, it would be quite possible for Lady Sherlock to reach that staircase that no one suspected of being used, keep her tryst with the stranger in the little plantation, creep back when it was dark...

After dinner Mr. Prede, the steward, called, and Sir Robert went to him in the library; Jenny watched her father go with a sense of relief. That would mean that he was out of the way for several hours; she knew how many papers Mr. Prede brought with him and how conscientious the two men were in the management of the large estate. Then Miss Prescott took Fanny upstairs. Bobby was already in bed and his charge was left to a nursemaid.

Jenny had her time to herself. She thought with an indescribable pang how unsuspicious, how free the household was. How easy it would be for anyone to play tricks, indulge in subterfuges and deceptions, how long it would be before anyone would be suspected of underhand dealings; Sir Robert's family had been trained to openness, confidence in themselves and in others. Espionage was unknown; even among the servants there was goodwill and good fellowship.

Jenny went upstairs.

'I do not know if I'm doing right or wrong,' she thought, 'but I've got to do it.'

And she knocked on her mother's door.

Lady Sherlock's voice said at once: "Who is that?" then, "Well, come in. The door's not locked."

Jenny turned the handle and entered her mother's beautiful room. It was situated in the front of the house, to the right of the portico, and there were several doors to it—that by which Jenny had entered from the landing, one along the same wall to the right of it that led to a corridor that communicated with Sir Robert's apartments, and the little door of, the alcove at the head of the bed that Jenny knew led to the music-room and the secret staircase.

The bed itself was in the French style and had replaced the heavy four-poster with the elaborate tester in which Sir Robert had been born; it was raised on a small dais of gilt wood and hung with curtains of pink velvet and ivory silk from a headpiece of gilded cupids holding up a wreath of flowers; the bed was frivolous and coquettish for the country house of an English gentleman, but it suited the other furnishings—the pale, rose-wreathed carpet, the straw-coloured silk and gold brocade at the windows, the crystal and gilt on the toilet table, the painted chairs and those small articles of luxury that Lady Sherlock kept scattered about—carved crystal bottles, brocade slippers, gold-lace scarves and satin-striped band-boxes and pretty striped papers in which she kept her latest novelties. For Lady Sherlock, though she dressed plainly and in superb taste, liked to fill her private room with a confusion of elegant and even foolish trifles.

She was in bed now, a silver gilt night lamp on the table by her side casting a faint glow over her pale hair, her delicate features, her swansdown wrap.

Jenny advanced quickly to cover her own confusion. She looked at her mother sharply and saw that she was, contrary to her custom, carefully and heavily rouged and painted.

'She is raddled with fear, I suppose,' thought the girl. She went on her knees on the dais and rested her head on the satin quilt.

"Another of my headaches. I'm tiresome; what your father calls a bore, am I not, Jenny?"

"Father's never called you a bore, Mother. He's only too sad about your headaches. Why can't Dr. Adams do something for them?" And she thought to herself: 'It's the first time I've played a part with Mother. She's spoken nonsense. I know perfectly well she hasn't had a headache, yet I must believe her.' "Can I do anything for you, Mother?"

"No, Jenny dear. You know there's nothing to be done. I've had all my usual remedies, Lockwood knows them by heart by now. Why didn't you change for dinner, Jenny?" she added, a little sharpness in her tone. "You've been wearing that dark-blue dress all day."

"I know." Jenny brought the lie she had used at the table. "I was thinking of Frank—he came to say good-bye."

"Oh, yes," there was no mistaking the eagerness in Lady Sherlock's tone. "Have you decided, dear, to go away with Frank?"

Jenny thought: 'I'm beginning to understand. She's in some desperate trouble and, doesn't want me to be involved.'

Yet Lady Sherlock talked so quietly and naturally that Jenny began to doubt the evidence of her own senses. In her mind she used this phrase that she had often heard on the lips of her nurse and the other servants; yes, she did begin to doubt if she had ever seen her mother in the clearing by the plantation,

talking with a stranger. She wished to think that this had not happened, so she puzzled in her own uncertainty and rose, intending to leave her mother before her sense of surety was shattered.

Lady Sherlock, whose thoughts were not at all on herself and her own affairs, implored her daughter, as she kissed her good night, to write soon to Frank and remember how important it was that the date of her marriage should soon be settled. Then she gave herself away completely and drove terror into her daughter's heart by looking directly into her eyes and saying:

"I saw you looking at the little secret door just now, Jenny. Secret indeed, why, the whole house knows of it! But that's what we used to call it when you were children, wasn't it? *L'escalier dérobé!* All French châteaux have one."

"The secret door," repeated Jenny, glancing down at the floor. "Was I looking at it? I wasn't thinking."

"Weren't you?" Lady Sherlock drew the fine shawl closer around her slender shoulders. "Your father wants me to have it closed up, he thinks it's draughty and inconvenient. But I like to keep it there. One never knows—sometimes it's pleasant to be able to escape into the garden at an odd time."

"Yes, I suppose it is very pleasant. Good night, Mother."

Jenny left the room with a swift step. She had come to a rapid resolve—it was no use trying to get under her mother's guard; the more she attempted to do so the more would Lady Sherlock wrap herself in a close reserve.

The secret staircase! Why that, now! Jenny did not know that she had even looked towards the door. Probably it was her mother's uneasy conscience that made her think so.

Jenny lay awake that night in the handsome room, stately for so young a girl, that she had occupied all her life. She felt an unknown force rising within her; she knew herself to be possessed of powers that until then had lain dormant She believed that she could be bold, unscrupulous, perhaps cruel in her mother's defence, she had a great trust in her own capabilities of intrigue and action.

Her own personal emotions seemed effaced; she could hardly bring herself to think of Frank or of her brother and sister, or of her friends, only of her mother.

She realized that first of all she must have a friend and adviser, she could not work alone. She was too ignorant of the world's usages, too inexperienced in the world's ways. Besides, and this fact gave her intense exasperation, as a young girl she would be unable to go about alone, to interview people, or even to have messages or letters sent.

Who should be this chosen friend, guide, champion? She might possibly have confided in Frank, if he had been on the spot; but she needed immediate help, and this was not a matter which she cared to put into writing.

Then—her father? It would be natural to turn to him, but she instinctively rejected this idea, for she knew Sir Robert too well to trust his handling of such a problem as that with which she had to deal. Besides, it would be like a betrayal of her mother's confidence to go to her father. Jenny was quite sure that of all the people in the world whom Lady Sherlock wished to keep far away from her secret the first was Sir Robert.

A brother or sister would have been the person in whom to confide, but Bobby was a child and Fanny little more. She could not possibly disturb them. Besides, they could not be of any assistance to her, they were continually watched by Mr. West or Miss Prescott.

Then with an intense relief she thought of Aunt Beardie, that woman of wisdom and experience, who seemed so liberal, so broadminded, who had seen life from so many aspects, who had had such various adventures. One, too, who knew and loved her mother, who was French—the same nationality as the unknown enemy.

Jenny believed that Aunt Beardie could be trusted, surely in her time she had kept many secrets? Although she was talkative and vivacious, she was not a gossip. Jenny had noticed that she was reserved, both about her own past and that of her friends. Names and titles did not lightly leave her lips. She had the dignity of one well trained both in the restraints taught by good society and by adversity.

Jenny felt very comforted as she thought of Aunt Beardie; she would visit her at the Dower House tomorrow, and sound her cautiously as to whether or no she might be trusted with this terrible, perhaps this vital, secret. She was sure that Aunt Beardie would be a firm and stanch ally. She was undoubtedly a woman of courage and resolution with an original mind and many talents.

It was easy for Jenny to pay a visit to Mlle de Saint-Alde, for hardly a day passed when one or other of the family did not go to the Dower House. Usually Miss Prescott took the children there for an hour or so in the afternoon, and they looked forward to this diversion from their usual routine with great pleasure. Aunt Beardie had so many amusing tricks, such an enthralling collection of odd curios; and her manners and genial good humour, shot with dry jests, were exactly such as were sure to please children.

Jenny restrained her impatience during the morning, which she occupied with casual tasks, and accompanied Miss Prescott, Fanny and Bobby to the Dower House in the afternoon. Lady Sherlock had not risen until late, but to jenny's great relief she was on the terrace with Lockwood working at a tapestry in a frame when the little party left the Manor House. For it had occurred to Jenny with a horrid sense of apprehension, that when they were all gone from the house—Sir Robert as usual was away at this time of day—Lady Sherlock might go down to the plantation and there meet the dreadful stranger.

As they walked through the thick August sunshine, golden and sweet like honey, the girl thought with panic: 'Is it always going to be like this? Shall I never dare to let her out of my sight? I must control myself, keep my courage.'

The sharp walk through the park would have been on another occasion a delight to Jenny, for she had the sensitiveness to appreciate the fleeting moments of youth, to relish the serenity and comfort of the scene and the company. It was agreeable to walk by dear Mary Prescott, so loyal, affable and grateful for her good fortune; it was charming to see the boy and girl running ahead, frolicking in and out of the light and shade, laughing at the startled deer that leaped in their path, chasing the gauzy swarm of gnats that buzzed in the air, and shooting with toy bows and arrows into the delicate foliage of the low boughs.

Although she had always appreciated these things, now Jenny felt that she had not appreciated them sufficiently, for already they were tainted and tarnished, overlaid and haunted.

Miss Prescott chattered amiably about Mlle de Saint-Alde, whom she was very careful never to term Aunt Beardie, for she considered this a disrespectful name for a lady of such high birth and so many misfortunes.

Jenny, preoccupied with her own dark thoughts, paid little attention to what the governess said, for she knew that Mary Prescott always had something amiable to say of everyone. But she was suddenly startled to hear her companion say:

"You know, Jenny, I think it is rather a pity that Lady Sherlock has forbidden me to leave the children alone with her... It's just a little awkward for me, I'm so afraid that Mlle de Saint-Alde might notice it."

"Oh, why?" asked Jenny. "I mean, why does Mother say they mustn't be left alone with Aunt Beardie?"

Miss Prescott coloured slightly and answered awkwardly:

"Well, you see, Jenny dear, it applies to you too, or I shouldn't have told you. Naturally," she added hastily, "not that I should for a moment even discuss Lady Sherlock's decision."

"I know of course you wouldn't," interrupted Jenny, smiling. "But tell me what it's all about."

"Well, simply this. Lady Sherlock thinks that Mlle de Saint-Alde has had a good many strange experiences and has lost something of her breeding and delicacy. She loves, Lady Sherlock thinks, to tell tales not altogether suited for young ears. You know, the poor lady went through some terrible times." Miss Prescott shuddered daintily. "She was imprisoned, too, was she not?"

"Well, I believe she was, poor old thing," smiled Jenny; "but I've never noticed her say anything shocking or, frightening."

"Neither have I," said Miss Prescott hastily, "that's why I was surprised. But of course I must obey Lady Sherlock."

"Well, I'll take some responsibility on myself," said Jenny. "I want to see her alone today. You know, I'm beginning to keep a diary—I've always wanted to do so—and I thought it weld be a good opportunity to begin the diary with an account of Mlle de Saint-Alde's coming into our family, and I should like to put a little history of her in it."

"That's exactly what Lady Sherlock doesn't wish," replied Miss Prescott quickly. "I understand what she means, Jenny darling. You see, anyone who's been through what Mlle de Saint-Alde has—well, after all, look at the way she lives. She's very peculiar, you know. She won't have any servants, and if it wasn't that Sir Robert insisted on sending the gardeners over, the outside of the house would be as neglected as the interior."

"Well, she doesn't mind the house being looked after properly," said Jenny; "it is in the interest of Father to do it. It's only those two rooms in which she lives and where she's got her own things. I think one can understand that."

"Well, Miss Jenny, you must do as you please. After all, you're not in my charge."

Miss Prescott smiled with a certain relief. She thought that it showed a surprising lack of taste on the part of Lady Sherlock so to mistrust her old friend who, although strange (sometimes to the point of craziness, Miss Prescott admitted), was undeniably well bred and was not likely to offend by telling the carefree English children or the protected English girl any appalling tales of violence or misery such as she had no doubt experienced or heard during the Terror.

This conversation had brought them to the gates of the grounds of the Dower House. Jenny looked up at it sharply. With the strong sunlight on it, it had lost the sinister look with which it had impressed her the night before. Now the

broad daylight showed the red colour of the chimneys and the different designs cut in their tiles; their twisted shapes seemed normal or almost so…Jenny was forced to admit to herself that she did not altogether like the look of the Dower House even in the sunlight.

Mlle de Saint-Alde, who expected a visit from the Manor House about this time in the afternoon, was on the lawn, reclining on a chaise-longue, plaiting a black silk hair-net.

She rose at once and welcomed her visitors with that wholehearted good burnout which the children found so delightful.

Jenny, though prejudiced in her favour, had to admit that in contrast with the children, Miss Prescott and herself in their cool muslin, in their plain country clothes, Mlle de Saint-Alde cut a grotesque figure. Even the August heat had not persuaded her to abandon her voluminous petticoat of ruffled and rather faded and cracked taffeta, or the large Andalusian shawl that she wore fastened by a large pink cameo brooch on her bosom, or the white straw bonnet—white it had been, before burnt and bleached by the sun—with the black ruches and black lace veil that she wore tied under her chin.

Welcoming them in her racy French that had, Jenny thought, a slight accent that she could not herself place, Mlle de Saint-Alde invited the party into the parlour that she had arranged according to her own tastes. Having taken a fancy to the Dower House and paying Sir Robert a reasonable sum for the use of it, she refused to use any more of it than these two rooms—which secretly pleased Sir Robert, for the house was well kept and handsomely furnished, and he was glad to have an excuse to send his own servants to look after all of it save the apartments that were actually being occupied by Mlle de Saint-Alde.

These were on the ground floor—a large parlour with a room at the back which had been turned into a bedroom. With the squeamishness common to many maiden ladies of her age, Mlle de Saint-Alde refused to allow anyone, even the woman who came up from the village to do her rough work, to enter this bedchamber that she kept carefully locked. She declared, frankly enough, that she had all the souvenirs of her youth there and she could not endure them to be disturbed, even by a kindly hand.

There was, however, no particular mystery about the room. She had taken Jenny, her brother and sister and Miss Prescott, into it more than once. It was a forlorn apartment, redolent, Jenny's sensitive imagination thought, of the hopes, aspirations, joys, despairs of a past age.

There was a large press full of old fashioned clothes, many of them of rich materials and all in need of repair. From these, which had been either bought secondhand or had been given to her by her friends and acquaintances, Mlle de Saint-Alde furnished her own wardrobe, altering, cutting and stitching with great ability.

There were stacks of periodicals and shelves of books, all dating from the end of the last century and many of them dealing with different aspects of the French Revolution of 1789.

There were several strong-boxes, which Mlle de Saint-Alde declared contained family prints and papers. Jenny supposed that the old lady, as was so often the case with people of her age and experience, attached exaggerated importance to these documents.

The bed had been brought down from one of the upper rooms; the furnishings belonged to the French lady and consisted of draperies, rich but

tattered, and a quilt that Mlle de Saint-Alde stoutly claimed had once belonged to Louis XIV.

How she came into possession of this or any of her other treasures she never disclosed. She liked to show this room to her visitors, and when they had admired her little hoard she would always declare, with an air of great satisfaction, that the rooms she had long occupied in Versailles contained an even more astonishing and valuable collection of objects.

But it was not into this room that she showed her visitors today, but into the front parlour, to Jenny a rather dreary room despite the afternoon sunshine that now poured into it. The furnishings were dark; there were grotesque Chinese figures peering out of the shadows from the top of high cabinets and everything was rather old-fashioned, though carefully kept.

After all, Jenny told herself, the Dower House was a melancholy place. It had never had children in it or young people. Only women who were widows and who had come there to end their days. And she thought inconsequently and in a flash of pretty little Mrs. Perry to whom her mother had lent the house and who had gone quickly, not without whispers of her unhappy history that penetrated even to Jenny's guarded seclusion.

But the children seemed unconscious of anything gloomy or sinister in the atmosphere of the Dower House, for Aunt Beardie was so extremely amusing. She always had a tray of different kinds of cakes that she had made herself, and glasses of syrup, also of her own concoction, ready for them, and some little treat or trick to amuse them.

Today there was a set of coloured pictures traced ready to be cut out and pasted against appropriate scenes. This was Fanny's amusement, and for Bobby there was a really handsome bow and arrow, which caused the boy to exclaim with delight. Aunt Beardie also possessed a set of toys beautifully made, coloured and polished, which included a cup and ball of ivory and ebony inlaid with pure gold.

Today, after all these amusements had been exhausted, the cake eaten and the syrups drunk, Bobby insisted on going into the garden to try his bow and arrow. Miss Prescott, who remembered Jenny's request, offered to take him and Fanny for a run in the garden, while Jenny said candidly that she would like to talk for a while to their kind hostess.

When Miss Prescott had gone and the door was closed upon her and the children, Jenny realized that she had never been alone before with this strange old woman who was so much a part of her mother's past. She looked with a touch of trepidation at the figure in the large tapestried chair by the window who had now resumed her busy plaiting of the hair-net.

Aunt Beardie's face was not as expressive as it had been when first she had known her. In the last few weeks she had taken to wearing silver-rimmed spectacles with slightly smoked glass, for she declared that her sight was beginning to fail and bright lights distressed her and that she had had to resume the use of the glasses that had been prescribed for her, when she had come out of prison years ago in France.

Jenny was sorry that she wore these spectacles, which hid her bright vivacious dark eyes and gave a look at once dark and glittering to her face.

"What do you want to see me about, Jenny?" she asked. She always spoke French with the members of the Sherlock family, save on the rare occasions when she met Sir Robert. Her English was fluent but not very good and apt

soon to become incoherent. Jenny spoke French as easily as she did English and loved the language.

She took a little stool worked in white beads and seated herself at the old lady's feet and told her briefly and frankly about her project of keeping the diary. This had been an excuse for wanting to be alone with Aunt Beardie when she spoke to Miss Prescott, but now it occurred to her that it would make a very good opening for a conversation with the old lady and gradually lead to the more intimate topic on which she wished to sound her.

Aunt Beardie, who continued plaiting—she did not need, she said, to see this work as her fingers moved mechanically—smiled as as she replied:

"A diary! That's rather a dangerous thing for a young girl to keep. It is not wise to trust one's secrets to paper, but there, I don't suppose that you have anything you won't want anyone else to see, even in twenty or thirty years' time."

"I've never kept a diary," said Jenny. "Mother found me once, remember, when I was beginning to do so, and she was quite passionate about it. She said it was a foolish waste of time. She took the book—I remember it was blue morocco, and I bought it myself in Winton—away from me. But afterwards, of course, she made me a recompense, buying me a beautiful workbox lined with pear-coloured satin."

Aunt Beardie laughed.

"Your dear mother is a very precise, proper sort of person and you would do well to obey her in everything she tells you. So you want to put a little sketch of poor Aunt Beardie and her life in your book?"

"Well, of course," smiled Jenny, turning her pure delicate face upwards towards the grotesque figure sitting in the tapestried chair; "you are of great interest to all of us. We live so near those dreadful times and we know so little of them."

Aunt Beardie interrupted:

"Don't seek to know any more. No one can tell you much about them. One went into prison—as I did—and came out to find one's whole world changed. One learned to be surprised at nothing—wealth, and titles and honours changed hands overnight. Life vas held very cheap and virtue cheaper still."

"But some people preserved their honour," protested Jenny. "Some people did come out of it—well, morally intact, did they not, Aunt Beardie?"

"Don't ask me," replied the lady. "I can't answer that type of question. As for my story, I'm determined never to write a line of it. And I've nothing to tell you. No, my dear child, don't come to me for little anecdotes and stories of how one escaped the guillotine or how another got into prison or out of it. People lost their identities, their characters, their names—they reappeared as something quite different. Some people were so adept in disguises that one day they were one person, another day they were another. Monks left their monasteries and became ruffling soldiers. Nuns escaped from their convents and became women of the town. On the other hand, great ladies became nuns, and fierce dragoons Trappist monks. Royal princesses fled for protection into lunatic asylums, hospitals were full of aristocrats lying in beds disguised as paupers. One became quite used to the sight of blood, that was everywhere. It was common to eat one's food at a restaurant and look down on the tumbrils going past to the guillotine."

Jenny felt a rising nausea at these cold words.

"I do not suppose you want to speak of those times, do you, Aunt Beardie? I should not have mentioned them. I wasn't thinking of that part of it, but of your escape—you must have had your pleasant times when you were a girl, a young woman as well as the days you are describing now."

"Oh yes, I had some pleasant times. I've read you some of my love-letters, haven't I? I've a good many more. They were brilliant offers, at least a few of them, and for a while I thought of marrying and leading a settled life. But it was impossible. You see me as I am now, old and broken, my dear Jenny. It is more suffering than age that has made me what I am. Look at my hands—so ugly, so gnarled. Look at my feet, splayed, flat. That's the rheumatism caught in the damp prisons in which I was confined. Yes, I had no sooner returned from Hamburg, thinking all my troubles were over, than I was seized on an absurd conspiracy charge and spent several years in a Breton prison. But don't let's think of these miseries."

"No, indeed, Mlle de Saint-Alde. I did not wish to revive them in your mind."

Jenny was moved by pity and admiration, for the old woman had spoken bravely and with dignity. These emotions made her rush into her subject.

"What I really wanted to see you about was my mother. I think perhaps she is in trouble, perhaps in danger, and I believe you could help."

"I! Help your mother! Why, that is absurd, my dear Jenny! Think of her position as Lady Sherlock, the wife of Sir Robert—wealthy, admired, secure! How could. I help her?"

"I don't know. You see, although it's a strange thought, you knew her before any of us. Perhaps you could tell me if something happened when you were in Hamburg together that might be the cause"—Jenny picked the words carefully—"of some trouble for her now."

Aunt Beardie coughed and said with a wry grimace:

"That is another legacy from the bad old days. The damp, my child, it got into my chest. Hear how cracked and sour my voice is, that once was pleasant enough. I keep on having these fits of coughing too. That's why you see me wrapped up in so many clothes even on a fine day. Always shivering as if I had been permanently chilled: What was that you were saying about your mother?"

"I'm trusting you," said Jenny in a low voice, "with what I haven't trusted my own father, or Frank Quarry, whom I'm going to marry. But I feel you are the right person to come to. As you have just been saying, things were so strange in those days, all so upside down. Did anything happen in Hamburg to hurt or frighten Mother? Was there anybody there who might have found her out now?"

"Why, it sounds as if you were talking of blackmail," said Aunt Beardie with another cough.

"What a hideous word," shuddered Jenny, "I never even thought of it."

"You need not think of it," replied the old woman drily. "Your mother had quite a safe, protected kind of life in Hamburg. As long as my father lived we were very comfortable. We had a furnished house and knew the best people. It was certainly rather different after he died. We lost touch with France, it was difficult to get messages or letters through. There was a certain period of hardship. Madame Heckel—who kept the post-house—was very good to us. My father did leave a little money and it was shared between us both."

"We all owe you so much," broke in Jenny impetuously, "for this kind generosity. Without you and your father, Mlle de Saint-Alde, Mother would surely never have survived."

"I don't think she would, because, you see, the old servant who was looking after her died on the voyage and there was no one else—"

"Then nothing happened in Hamburg? Nothing she might think of with terror, distaste?"

"Why, no. Of course, there was the uncertainty of what was happening to her parents. They were put in prison and we didn't hear from them for a long time. She was very much attached to them, and I think that grieved her a good deal. Besides, naturally enough, she was homesick. Hamburg is not a very prepossessing city and she had been very happy in the château de Vernon. What makes you think, my dear child, that your mother remembers those days with any kind, as you put it, of terror or distaste?"

"I could not tell you. But I've had that feeling once or twice. There's a little book she has, with a few notes in it, and a pencil drawing—of you. That's odd."

"I expect it is. I don't suppose it's in the least like what I am now—with my ugly hard features. I was quite a pretty child."

"Yes, it's a drawing of a charming little girl. Mother looks at it sometimes, or used to before you came. I'm talking, of course, of the past now. And I thought at those times' there seemed a sort of cloud over her—restlessness and nerves. You see, I'm very fond of my mother, Mlle de Saint-Alde, very sensitive to everything that concerns her."

"Yes, but it's true," returned the old lady wisely, "that that kind of affection sometimes leads one astray. One attaches importance to trifles, as you are doing, my dear. There was absolutely nothing in your mother's life at Hamburg to cause her distress in the remembrance."

"And there was no one else there?" insisted Jenny, frowning in her earnestness. "No other person besides your father and yourself and this German woman?"

"Why, there were a few acquaintances," returned Aunt Beardie, "people who came and went. There were a great number of exiles there, and we knew some of them. But what do you mean—another person?"

"I don't know; I couldn't tell you. But I had that sense of another personality in Mother's past. And I had the feeling, too, Aunt Beardie, that this other personality has come forward again. I wonder if I should tell you."

She paused, and the old woman put out her knotted, mittened hands comfortingly and patted her shoulder.

"You may tell me everything. I am an old woman and have had a great deal of experience. I am also a person of infinite discretion."

"I'm sure of that, that's why I came to you. You are a person who has suffered. Perhaps Mother had suffered also, when she came back from Hamburg."

"Oh no, she had her parents—I had nobody. You know the story of my birth, don't you? Well, I had no name, no home. When my father had gone all protection had gone. All I had was papers—his present Majesty's receipt for five million livres. But your mother—she went directly back to the château in Brittany, her hôtel in Paris—she had everything. The Vernons regained a good deal of their fortune, and presently it was all returned. Her father had some of his offices restored to him. Her brother, after the Restoration, obtained a post in the house of Madame la Dauphine, as you know."

"But how was it," said Jenny, a little puzzled, "that Mother did not look after you as your father had looked after her?"

"I never asked her," replied Mlle de Saint-Alde sombrely. "I fell into some adventures that I don't care to relate when I left Hamburg. Charlatans and cheats got hold of me. Besides, I was ashamed—I found out then that I was illegitimate, that I had no claim to my father's fortune, no right to his name. I was also young, wilful and proud. I fell into prison. I went to America; I travelled in Germany. But there, as I said, I don't intend to give you a recital of my adventures."

Jenny had the passing thought as she had had before that these same adventures were all extremely incoherent and that probably the old lady was getting them confused in her mind—prison, America, the company of charlatans, brilliant proposals of marriages—what a medley they all made! But what resolution and force of character Aunt Beardie must have possessed to have survived all these vicissitudes and still be, though ugly and so much altered, so strong-minded and courageous!

Now she affectionately pressed Jenny to tell her the grounds for her fears; and Jenny, thus encouraged and fascinated—for there was no doubt there was a good deal of personal magnetism about Aunt Beardie—confided in her the two occasions on which she had seen the stranger (like visions, they seemed to disappear, to lose their outline in the telling) once in the church in Paris, once in the plantation.

At the end of this rapid and breathless recital, Aunt Beardie frankly laughed. She laid down her plaiting and turned her glittering glasses towards the pale face of the girl.

"My poor baby, my poor lamb!" she said. "You should get married to your English cavalier. You've been with your mother too long; you're brooding, you're imagining things. I've known your mother, as I told you, through all the worst part of her troubles during the Revolution, and there was nothing, absolutely nothing, that happened to her to give any grounds for this fantastic tale. Why, my dear child, do you know what you're saying—that your mother is being blackmailed."

This was the second time that Aunt Beardie had used this word, which she gave in its English form.

Jenny shrank into herself and regretted her candour.

"I didn't mean that, Mlle de Saint-Alde. Pray don't use that expression. I thought it was somebody appealing to Mother's kindness. Someone whom she had known then, who was now in distress—that she was trying to find money for him. You know, she spends nearly all her own fortune on that charity she has at Fulham."

"The Home for Magdalenes," said Aunt Beardie, with a peculiar smile. "Your mother has promised to take me there to see those poor creatures."

"But who do you think it was I saw?" insisted Jenny. "Who was that man kneeling beside Mother?"

"What she said, I think, my dear child—some stranger who had begged her courtesy—asked to be allowed to kneel in his usual place."

"But it was the same man I saw in the woods."

"There I would swear you're mistaken," said the old lady coolly. "That couple you saw in the woods, I should think it was a serving-maid and one of the game-keepers."

"But she turned and I saw her face—my mother's face. I heard what they said." Again Jenny repeated the conversation.

"Well, I don't make any sense of it," replied Aunt Beardie, still unperturbed. "I think, my dear child, you're dwelling too much on your mother. And I suppose the fact that I have come into her life has made you think of the past. You have an intense sympathy for her, for what she has suffered. That makes you imagine these things. If it was your mother whom you saw, I am quite sure she was not with any mysterious stranger. It must have been some acquaintance whom she had chanced to meet."

"But that is absurd, Aunt Beardie. Mother never goes out in the woods alone like that at night. Besides, she was speaking French. Whom do we know round here who speaks French fluently like that?"

"Well, then," replied Aunt Beardie firmly, "it was a delusion. Persuade yourself of that. Your mother is happy and safe, repeat that to yourself."

"I can't," said Jenny, rising abruptly, "I don't believe it. I think she is in danger and I think she is threatened. You may have forgotten, you know, Mlle de Saint-Alde. After all, it's a long time ago—thirty years or more."

"I've not forgotten," replied Aunt Beardie firmly, and with a touch of grimness. "I remember every day and everything that happened in it during our stay in Hamburg."

"Then something may have occurred afterwards. You say she went back to her parents in Brittany, but you cannot be sure of that."

"They came and fetched her," said Mlle de Saint-Alde shortly.

"Assuredly. It is strange, though, they did not fetch you also."

"I ran away; I hid. I had just had typhus, I was ill. I was practically still a patient in the hospital, I did not want their charity."

Aunt Beardie suddenly rose, a formidable figure in the trailing shawl, the rusty taffeta, the poke bonnet.

"Aren't you hot in all those heavy clothes?" asked Jenny wearily. She felt that the conversation had been a failure, she wished she had not betrayed a secret that was not her own, even to this kind friend.

"I told you, my dear child, I'm chilled to the very bone. I should take my bonnet off, of course, but I have a foolish habit of always wearing it."

Aunt Beardie untied the strings of the poke bonnet, took it off carefully and laid it on the chair beside her. Jenny hid not often seen her without the bonnet—she looked less formidable and less ridiculous with her hair uncovered. She wore her iron-grey tresses in a net of black chenille hanging in a heavy slab on the nape of her neck, drawn in flat bands across her high forehead. Removing her glasses and turning on Jenny her bright, shining eyes, she said in intense, emotional tones:

"My dear, pretty child, don't think any more of this. It's all nonsense, just cobwebs you've been spinning out of your own mind. Now I'm not going to let you talk of it again."

"But I shall think of it, just the same," said Jenny. She rose from her stool, sighed, and said suddenly: "There was a Frenchman came here. He stayed at the 'Sherlock Arms' and gave his name as M. Beyrolles. He asked a great number of questions about Mother, Father, all of us—"

"Well, I expect there's a quite reasonable explanation for that," said Aunt Beardie comfortably. "Who did this person say he was?"

"Well, just a traveller making notes about England. I think he was going to write a book."

"Well, that's probably the truth. I'm afraid you're a very romantic young lady, Jenny. If anything seems commonplace or dull, you just will not believe it—you must go on to something high-flown and extravagant."

Jenny did not feel that these censures were in the least deserved. She had always prided herself on possessing a cool common sense and a logical mind; but she saw that it was no use trying to convince Aunt Beardie of this, and that she had made a mistake in speaking to her at all.

So she tried to cover up her error by pretending to agree with the old woman's point of view.

"Well, I dare say you are right, Mlle de Saint-Alde. And I read too many books from the library and have my nose in too many old romances."

Then she tried to explain away what she believed was ugly in the conversation.

"Naturally, I never thought Mother had ever done anything wrong. It's impossible that anybody knowing her could think so. I thought perhaps some unfortunate creature whom she had once been in touch with had fallen on some terrible misfortune and that she was trying to bear all this sorrow by herself."

"If it were so I should know it. You may not think so," said Aunt Beardie, moving towards the door, "but she is very much in my confidence."

"I thought that was so, that's why I came to see you."

"You may continue to think so, my dear child. I know more of your mother's inner history, her inner thoughts, of her emotions and feeling, than even your father does."

"I can believe that. As I tell you, that's why I came to you."

"Well, believing that, you can rest in my assurance that nothing is troubling your mother whatsoever, except it be her own whims and fancies. After all, dear Vivienne leads a very idle and luxurious life, you know, and she may well get what we French call the magots in her head. Now let us go out and find the little ones. This house is old and gloomy for you, Jenny darling. You should seek the sunshine."

The rest of the afternoon passed in agreeable commonplaces. Aunt Beardie seemed to exert herself to be amusing and delightful with the children, and Miss Prescott was voicing her praises when the little party turned again across the darkening park towards the Manor House.

Jenny was thinking:

'How strange that a woman of her experience who is, as she says, so intimate with Mother, should make such a mistake. For I'm quite sure that something horrible has come into Mother's life. Now it seems that single-handed I shall have to find out about it, to protect her, perhaps to save her.'

Jenny was balked by the result of her interview with Mlle de Saint-Alde. She tried to tell herself that she was reassured, but her inner uneasiness continued. She could not persuade herself that there was nothing sinister in the two incidents she had seen, she could not persuade herself—she was watching her mother very carefully, if cautiously—that Lady Sherlock's serenity was not assumed.

Her mother's long moods of abstraction, her sudden fits of unnatural gaiety, her bursts of affection towards the children, towards Jenny herself—and she was not a demonstrative woman—her frequent headaches, attacks of pain during which she rocked herself into her room—how could Jenny, knowing

what she knew, ignore all these signs of a mind that was so troubled, perhaps tormented?

Jenny was exasperated by the obtuseness of her father. Sir Robert, absorbed in his own hearty, wholesome affairs, was not so very often or so very long in the company of his wife, and appeared to notice nothing of her distress and distractions; but it was certain that Lady Sherlock was a good actress. 'It may be,' thought Jenny, 'that she could deceive anyone who loves her less than I do.' But then, that was to admit that the father did love his wife less than did his daughter, and Jenny knew that her father's affection for all the members of his family was very profound and strong.

How delightful it would be, what a relief from her own burden, if Sir Robert should come to suspect that something was wrong with his wife, tax her with it and make her tell him her trouble!

'Then all my anxiety would be over,' thought Jenny. 'Father would help Mother. I dare say it's nothing very serious, but seems to grow in importance because she keeps it hidden to herself. He would soothe all her agitation. He's a man, he knows the world, how to deal with people, how to manage—scoundrels, perhaps.'

But it was hopeless; Sir Robert could not see for himself, and Jenny could not tell him. She knew the type he was—a man used to good fortune and easy living, who would find it very hard to credit that any trouble, much less any tragedy, should touch his own home circle, which he regarded almost as something sacred. Complacent, good-tempered, sure of himself, Sir Robert was the last man to suspect anything sinister or even strange in anyone's history, least of all in that of his wife.

'Mlle de Saint-Alde,' thought Jenny, 'assured me that there was nothing strange in Mother's story. But she was wrong, I'm sure she was wrong...'

Jenny, therefore, was thrown back on her own wits, and after a few days of anxious debate she decided, towards the end of August, to go to Brittany and ask the help of her Uncle Charles. He was a good deal younger than her mother, a man scarcely yet in the prime of life. He was used to courts, the highest employment, noble society, managing a large estate, and an official position; far more subtle, worldly and shrewd than Sir Robert, he was possessed of a delicacy of tact that would make it impossible for him to offend. Jenny was sure of a sensitive sympathy from her uncle, and, she believed, a powerful help.

It was not difficult for her to arrange a visit to Paris, though it earned her the title of a reckless gadabout. Her father smilingly told her that she was more French than English and hardly happy in her native country.

Were there, he asked jestingly, still any fashions left to be bought at the Palais-Royal? And kissing her, he said: "Surely, my darling Jenny, before you buy any more dresses you must settle the date of the wedding?"

Jenny allowed it to be thought that she was running after the fashionable novelties that appeared every month in the Paris shops. There was a lucky opportunity for her to be chaperoned on the journey; a Lady Fairley, aunt of Francis Quarry, was crossing at that time to visit a married niece, so Jenny was allowed to travel with her and share her servants, thus escaping what was very important to her to escape—the company of a maid. She promised that she would hire a French girl in Paris.

"Though make sure she is more satisfactory than was poor Clarisse," warned Sir Robert. "You know that you and your mother were always complaining of her."

Jenny was relieved to notice that her mother seemed to suspect nothing untoward in this visit. After all, the girl usually went to France as she pleased. She did not propose to be away more than a fortnight or three weeks, so Lady Sherlock made little ado about her departure, only mildly remarking: "You would not go to London for the season, Jenny, but you might as well have done so as running over to Paris."

"I'm going to Brittany. I shall only be a day or two in Paris, Mother."

She felt that Lady Sherlock was really rather pleased to be rid of her. 'She has to act a great deal when I am about,' thought the girl. 'It will be a relief to her to be herself. I believe she is sure that I know something.' She wished that there were someone whom she could leave in charge, as it were, of her mother—someone who would tenderly and discreetly watch her. And yet this was a terrible thought, too, and Jenny shrank from it. Was she to introduce spies into the happy family at Sherlock? Yet she wondered if she could ask Mlle de Saint-Alde to write to her reports of her mother's health and conduct, but decided she could not bring herself to do this.

The day before she departed in the family coach with Sir Robert for London, where she was to meet her friend, a little incident occurred that Jenny remembered throughout the whole of the long and tedious journey to Paris, and which familiarity never rendered agreeable.

Lockwood had packed all her clothes for her and she was standing in the twilight, thoughtfully, between the drawn curtains of her window looking out across the park where the long shadows on the grass were gradually blurring into darkness and the sky was whitening behind the yellow leaves of the chestnut trees.

She held in her hand a small notebook that she had bought in Winton the last time she had been there. It was her intention to write down in this what Mlle de Saint-Alde had told her, what her Uncle Charles would tell her, and her own reflections on the problem that tormented her. Lady Sherlock entered the room quietly and come up behind her with so noiseless a tread that Jenny would not have known she was there had it not been for the rustle of the stiff watered-silk she wore. Jenny turned with her usual smile of welcome on her lips, but Lady Sherlock was frowning.

"What is that you've got in your hand, Jenny?"

"A book in which I mean to keep a kind of diary. For you know, Mother—" Jenny was going to say that she had tried for many years to keep a diary, but had been too lazy or too distracted, when Lady Sherlock interrupted:

"Give the book to me." And took it brusquely out of Jenny's hand, quickly turning the pages. Seeing them blank she gave a forced laugh. "What jest are you playing, Jenny? A diary! This is no such thing!"

"It's not begun yet," said Jenny. "Why are you so disturbed, Mother?" She spoke the words sternly, like a challenge. "I remember before you did not want me to keep a diary."

"It's foolish! What has a girl like you to put in a diary but trivialities?"

"And perhaps some secrets," said Jenny, trying to smile. "Most girls have, have they not, Mother?"

"What secrets could you have, Jenny? You've been brought up in the light of day, always protected and loved." Then, as if aware she was speaking too seriously for the occasion, Lady Sherlock altered her tone and said in a low voice: "Frank loves you; you'll be Lady Quarry. Your life should be eventless, blameless, Jenny."

"But, Mother! All this solemnity just because you thought I was keeping a diary! I remember you checked me before."

"I dislike them."

"Did you ever keep one yourself, Mother?"

"I? No!" The eyes of the two women met, and Jenny knew that her mother lied.

She continued quietly, surprised at her own courage, a courage that was almost cruelty:

"But if you had kept one, Mother, how interesting, how dreadful it would have been. You had such a strange youth. People are eager now for every wisp of information about the Revolution."

"Are they?" asked Lady Sherlock, with a stiff smile. "Only those who did not have to live through it. Enough has been written and said about those black days, Jenny, without my poor scribbles being added to it. I'm glad I did not keep a diary."

"No letters? Nothing at all?" urged Jenny. "How did you spend your time in Hamburg, Mother?"

Lady Sherlock moved quickly past her daughter, stood before the window and pulled the curtains yet farther apart as if she sought more light. But there was nothing but shadows about the house, shadows from the trees in the park and on the night clouds that gathered over the hyacinth-pale sky, shadows that seemed to close in on Sherlock Manor House, on the figure of the woman standing I here.

"It was a very quiet life," she said in a still voice. "We lived, Estienne and I, amongst the German girls. There was a certain amount of society. We used to knit and sew and sometimes went to a concert. We had to make our own clothes after a little while, for M. de Saint-Alde became short of money."

"He should have taken more with him from France," said Jenny cautiously. She felt that she had never before got so far into the heart of her mother's story. "Did not you use to tell us, Mother, that he had a great quantity of gold and jewels? And you were not in Hamburg so long. Were these treasures stolen?"

"I don't know where the money went," continued Lady Sherlock, in the same tone and still staring before her. "I think he lent some of it to others more unfortunate than we were. He was a very generous man and quite indifferent to economies. He insisted that we should have servants, at first a carriage, even."

"Have you ever met any of the people who were in Hamburg with you, Mother? I mean, the other exiles. Some of them must be living still."

"Are they?" Lady Sherlock turned her large blank eyes towards her daughter. "I don't know. Why are you questioning me like this, Jenny?"

"Oh, Mother, I hope I'm not questioning you. I feel sometimes as if that old sorrow was over you still, and what troubles you, troubles me."

"I should be a very ungrateful woman," replied Lady Sherlock, "if I allowed anything so distant, so forgotten, to trouble me."

Then she made what was, Jenny thought, a curious remark.

"If ever I were in any trouble, if ever I were confronted with any mischief, Jenny, I should know how to fight it. You would not have to concern yourself for me. I have a certain courage."

And with that she kissed the girl on the brow, gave a sudden light laugh, and added:

"How is it we've become so serious? I must give you that list—what I want for myself and Fanny—and a present for Mary Prescott, in Paris."

But when she looked into the bag that hung by long gold ribbons from her wrist she found the paper was not there. So with another laugh and her light elegant step, she left the room.

Jenny had the impression that her mother had been reciting a lesson carefully learned when she had spoken of her Hamburg days. The words, the look, the gestures, had all been almost automatic. Jenny was frightened at her own powers of observation, at the way her mind was working independently of her heart. And when she reached the familiar room in the Hôtel de Vernon this last interview with mother was vividly before her mind. M. de Vernon had come to Paris to receive his niece, for the Court had left the capital and most of the nobility were in their country châteaux. Paris, golden with the leaves of fading chestnuts, acacias and elms, noble with the wide squares and sweepings quays, was deserted in the fashionable quarter where the Hôtel de Vernon was situated, and most of the great houses were shut up in the charge of a few servants.

This surrounding solitude gave Jenny courage to approach her uncle on the matter which was beginning to lie so heavy on her heart.

She began as she had begun with Mlle de Saint-Alde, by careful and delicate questioning as to what M. de Vernon knew of his sister's life in Hamburg. But it was the same as it had been when she spoke to Aunt Beardie—she was baffled, left forlorn.

For M. de Vernon, who seemed to speak with complete frankness, confirmed Mlle de Saint-Alde's story in every detail. According to him, there had been not so much as one disagreeable incident during the exile in the German port. He almost smiled, though tenderly enough, at the idea that Jenny put forward as the cloak to her real design—that the reappearance of Estienne de Saint-Alde had caused Lady Sherlock to brood upon an unhappy episode in her childhood. So emphatic and yet so casual was he on this point that Jenny swiftly decided not to confide in him, not to ask his advice.

Experienced and worldly as he was, he would merely be surprised, perhaps a little shocked, and would, though no doubt most kindly and courteously, give her to understand that she had some bees in her bonnet and was making a considerable fuss over nothing at all.

Indeed, now it came to the point, she felt that she could not endure to tell him of the two occasions on which she had seen her mother with a stranger.

Thus, within twenty-four hours of her arrival in Paris, Jenny felt that her visit had been a failure and that she was as far as ever from getting at the truth of the mystery that she believed surrounded her mother. This was the first time that she had said that even in her thoughts—a mystery, and one that affected her mother; now to herself she had admitted this terror.

After a tedious night, in which a dozen projects had come into her head to be turned over and dismissed, jenny asked her uncle at breakfast if there was no one surviving who had been with the two girls in Hamburg.

"Is there not anyone who knew them there, Uncle Charles?" She tried to make her tone casual.

M de Vernon raised his eyebrows as he said, smiling:

"Poor old Aunt Beardie seems to have got on your nerves, Jenny. Why should her reappearance, strange as it was, make you think of those Hamburg days? They were very uneventful, I assure you. Why, you should hear some of the stories that are told of the Revolution."

"I don't wish to," said Jenny swiftly. "It's all horrible. You talk about its being romantic, adventurous and exciting—I think of it only with blank disgust and distaste. What people must have endured! You know what Mlle de Saint-Alde herself told me—that people lost their entire personalities, changed almost overnight. They went into prison, and when they came out again the whole world was different."

"Well, then, my dear child, if it affects you like this," smiled M. de Vernon, "why trouble yourself about it? I'm sure your mother has forgotten."

"But Mlle de Saint-Alde hasn't forgotten," persisted Jenny, narrowing her eyes at her uncle. "She's a curious person, don't you think, Uncle Charles?"

"Yes, she certainly is attractive, too. She's a woman of much experience. She's had a peculiar life, but through it all I think she's preserved her dignity and her good humour. I am very happy that I have been able to get her quite a handsome pension. There are rooms too in the château in Versailles any time she likes to go."

"She won't go, I think—she seems too contented in the Dower House."

Then Jenny told her uncle how Aunt Beardie lived and how secret she was with her bedchamber, how reserved in her habits, living without servants.

M. de Vernon only laughed good-humouredly:

"People who have been through less than she has are in asylums."

"What actually has she been through?" asked Jenny quickly. "Her story to me is incoherent."

"I dare say it is incoherent in her own mind also," replied M. de Vernon in sudden gravity. "Better not inquire what she's been through. She's seen murders, perhaps massacres. She's been in hourly expectation of her own death. She must be a brave woman."

"Yes, she's brave, I'm sure of that! Isn't it strange how she should return really, as it were, from the grave? I always thought Mother said she died in her own arms of typhus in Hamburg."

"Well, your mother couldn't have said that Jenny. I believe her friend was very ill with typhus. But why do we dwell on these ugly incidents? Estienne de Saint-Alde's reappearance is not really so very peculiar. I hear stranger tales than that every clay, of the return of people who have lost their memory,' or wandered away, or taken assumed names Remember what happened in France in the last forty years or so and you'll be surprised at nothing."

Then as he rose and threw down his napkin, he said:

"Yes, there is somebody. It's curious, it comes into my mind now. There is a certain Peter Henlein who has a little bookshop in the rue de Lillebonne. It is not far from the Place Vendelme. Your grandfather set him up in business. He was the captain of the SACHSEN on which your mother, M. de Saint-Alde, his daughter, and poor Gilles, the servant, went from St. Malo to Hamburg."

"He is here, in Paris—the captain?" Jenny was confused, in a horrid way excited.

"Yes, I believe he was a good fellow, though rough, and not above making all the money he could. But he had a misfortune—an explosion that injured him so that he could not continue with his work. Then he thought of coming to Paris and seeing what he could get out of the refugees he had taken across to Germany and who might then, he thought, be restored. Some of them were. He looked up my father, who was exceedingly grateful to him, though I believe the rascal had been overpaid by M. de Saint-Alde. There was a subscription got up for the old fellow and he now has this bookshop of nautical subjects and relics of the Revolution. It might amuse you to go there one of these days."

"Does Mother know of this?"

"I don't know. The fellow's not been in my mind for years. He never troubles us and I never go near him. I believe he does quite well, although there are so many sellers of such curios in Paris. I don't suppose your mother was told, and I shouldn't tell her if I were you, Jenny. We always thought it might bring back to her the death of Gilles—the old, ugly times."

"I should like to go to this shop."

M. de Vernon wrote down on a slip of paper taken from his tablet the name and address of the old German and told Jenny that she might, if she would, take a maid to this place, perhaps buy a souvenir there.

Part IV

Panic

Jenny went to the shop, but without a maid; she had, when in Paris before, tried to shake off the tedious company of governess or chamberwoman, because of her independent spirit, her desire for freedom and to see things for herself; but she had always kept discreetly to the broad handsome boulevards where everyone was civil and respectful.

Now, dropping her veil over her face and clutching her shawl nervously over her bosom, she slipped out of the Hôtel de Vernon and making her way by the map that she had fixed in her mind, she went to a quieter quarter of the city which took her a brisk half-hour's walk to reach; the rue de Lillebonne was, after all, a long way from the Place Vendôme when one walked.

There she discovered, in the angle of a little passageway, the low dark shop above which hung an enormous glass bottle that contained a full-rigged ship. The windows, overshadowed and darkened by the upper storey, were full of a medley of curios—prints mostly crudely coloured, of Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette and the Dauphin and other notables of the last years of the last century, little models of the guillotine and the tumbrils, the last filled with wooden dolls carefully dressed in old fashioned clothes, and pictures of all sorts and manner of ships, British, French, Spanish, and American men-o'-war, brigs, sloops, and packets, together with portraits, some rough and many highly finished, of the aristocrats who were supposed to have fled on board these various vessels during the reign of Terror. In the centre of the window was a model of a full-rigged brigantine with the name SACHSEN written on the prow.

Jenny entered the shop, tinkling the bell overhead as she pushed the heavy door.

The old sailor, who appeared to be about eighty years of age, but who was still rude and hearty like a gnarled oak, was sitting dozing on a chair behind the counter; a pot of beer and the day's Gazette were by his side and on a low table in front of him was a quantity of material—wood, string, paint, wire—that he had been using in constructing the model of a ship. He had lost his left arm, and there was a patch over his right eye. He rose courteously enough as Jenny entered, and asked her, in French with a heavy accent, what he could show her in the way of curios, souvenirs, or pictures.

Jenny was at a loss. She had come quickly on her errand, her mind full of the past, and had never considered what she would say when she reached the little shop. She sat down now on the high stool and stared at the old man, thinking of that day so long ago when the two girls had hurried on board the SACHSEN at St. Malo.

Without art she broke into her subject.

"I am the daughter of one of the fugitives—she was a child at the time—who crossed from Brittany on your ship. I have only just learned from my uncle that you are here. I think I heard your name before. You wouldn't know mine—I'm Jenny Sherlock."

The old man's face brightened with gratified vanity. Nothing pleased him better than a visit from one of the people whom, as he termed it, he had saved during the Terror. And next to seeing one of the survivors themselves, he liked to see a son or daughter. He stretched out his remaining hand and his remaining eye gleamed welcome as he solemnly, lapsing into the German language in his enthusiasm, recited his services to the French aristocracy.

He had long ago composed a flowery narrative on this theme that he had learned by rote and that he seldom altered by as much as a word—what dangers he had undergone; what sacrifices he had made! In the end he had taken people for nothing and lost all his money.

Jenny hardly listened. She took out her purse, knitted of puce-coloured silk, and laid it on the counter.

"Of course, I want to make you a present before I go home. I don't suppose my mother will come to see you—she can't remember those days with much pleasure."

The old man now demanded with much respect who was mademoiselle's mother.

"Why, how strange! I don't suppose you'd even remember—you took so many people to Hamburg. But perhaps you would remember—two young girls with two men, the father of one of them and a servant. M. de Saint-Alde, the banker, and his daughter, and my mother, Vivienne de Vernon, who was in the charge of Gilles, an old steward." And Jenny added the month and the date.

The German remembered perfectly; He, indeed, had always taken good care to impress on his mind the names and rank of the fugitives whom he took on board his ship. Not that he was always able to ascertain these directly, but his passengers were usually provided with some kind of passport, and he generally made it his business to look over these before the refugees left the ship.

He remembered quite well M. de Saint-Alde—the name was so famous, so often in the newspapers. A very wealthy banker; the old man remembered, too, how much he had made out of that particular passenger. M. Saint-Alde and his

daughter, certainly, had vanished in the tumults of the times, but when he had come to Paris the father of Mlle de Saint-Alde's companion had been the most generous of his patrons and had contributed most handsomely to setting him up in the little shop, which had proved such an agreeable livelihood.

Jenny waited until the old man had talked himself out. She felt depressed, she did not know after all why she had come or what she hoped to discover. She began to question him in a conventional way about the incidents of the voyage, that sunny day so long ago. It had been sunny had it not?

Yes, the old sea captain declared, glorious weather. He recalled it quite well, there had been a little misunderstanding. The gentlemen thought that they were going to Plymouth, but of course he, the captain, had to go where he had letters of embarkation. Well, times were hard and bloody and many people lost their heads and did not care as long as they got on a ship where they went.

"Gentlemen!" said Jenny. "But there was only M. de Saint-Alde and a servant. My grandfather used to tell me about it, I remember, when I was a very little girl—old Gilles."

"Yes, there was the servant, I remember him. Eh, I should have good cause to remember him!—he fell into a fit of vexation when he found we were bound for Hamburg and not Plymouth. We had to bury him at sea, and his little mistress wasn't told about it. There were two gentlemen as well."

"Two gentlemen? No, you're wrong! You've got it confused with some other journey."

"Indeed I've not!" The old captain was firm on this point. "I remember it all as clearly as if it were yesterday. There was M. de Saint-Alde, the banker—I saw his passport myself; there was the young gentleman who undertook all the negotiations. Why, as a matter of fact, he knew we were going to Hamburg and made no difficulty about it, and I never could understand why he pretended afterwards to be so put about. But it was no business of mine to go into their affairs."

"Who was he, this person?"

"That I don't know. He had an air of authority and kept himself to himself. I remember the old servant didn't like him—I think they quarrelled. I can't be supposed to remember all that."

"But you said you saw the passports of the others, didn't you see his?"

"No, I don't think I did. You see, there was a good deal of trouble over the servant dying like that."

The old German became taciturn, even uneasy. And Jenny remembered the old family story that the servant had not died but been murdered on the ship. She felt her heart beating quickly like a silly schoolgirl's, she rebuked herself.

Was she on the track of something important, something perhaps deadly? Who was this person of whom She now heard for the first time? Of whom neither her another nor Mlle de Saint-Alde had ever spoken?

"Oh yes, I remember M. Bernard," grinned the old captain. "Why, he drove hard bargain with me. He said he had the whole party in his charge and had hardly enough money to pay for one good passage. But I got fair price out of him in the end. Though," he added hastily, "of course I lost on all those transactions. It was the goodness of my heart, the purity of my sentiments that betrayed me."

"M. Bernard," repeated Jenny quietly. "That wasn't his real name?"

"Of course we all understood that. He might have been some great nobleman in disguise—that's what he wanted us to think he was. But the Breton servant, and he was a shrewd old fellow, he didn't seem to like him. I heard him and the other gentleman—the banker—arguing about him."

"Do you remember so very clearly after so many years?"

"Yes, sitting here in my little shop making my models I've nothing to do but remember. I've got a journalist friend, he's been telling me to write a book about these things. Sometimes I do make my notes."

He suddenly cast a shrewd look at the young lady out of his pale watery-blue eye.

"Haven't you ever heard of this gentleman before? Hasn't he been mentioned in your family?"

"Oh yes," lied Jenny hastily. "But they never seemed to know quite who he was or where he went to."

"Well, I don't know anything more about him than that. I saw him once or twice in Hamburg, going about by the port, well dressed, with a servant. But he kept his own counsel. Well, whoever he was—rogue or scoundrel or gentleman or nobleman in disguise—I expect he's gone to his account now. Not many who were flourishing in those days survived the murders, the massacres and the battles."

"It's a pity," said Jenny, rising, "we cannot trace him. My family owes him a good deal."

"Yes, he seemed to have all the business on his shoulders. He kept his head; I will say that for him."

"What was he like?" murmured Jenny, taking a gold livre out of the knitted silk purse. "One has a certain curiosity."

"Hasn't your mother—Mlle de Vernon that was—ever described him to you?"

"I don't care to talk to her about these incidents. You see, she's not even allowed to know that you're in Paris."

"Well, I suppose it was a shocking experience for a young lady. But she was well looked after, for all I can see. They had handsome luggage with them, and money too, I've no doubt. The young man—why, I can hardly tell you that. He was tall, good-looking, had chestnut hair, a riding-coat, and an energetic way with him. A Frenchman. I don't remember any more, and I shouldn't trouble my head about it, if I were you, mademoiselle. As I say, it's a million chances to one he's dead many years ago."

Jenny put her gold piece down on the counter, promised to come back and buy a model of the SACHSEN, and left the shop.

She was much shaken, much perturbed and confused in spirit, for all seemed clear. It was no mystery. This man, M. Bernard, had come out of the past and was threatening her mother. She was certain it was he whom she had seen in the church and in the plantation.

What did he know about her mother? Why had her mother never mentioned him? Why had Mlle de Saint-Alde been silent about him too?

Jenny's rasped emotions turned with a warm gush of affection towards Aunt Beardie—she was loyal, the old woman. She knew that something had happened in connection with that man. She was ready to deify his very existence in order to save her friend. Then Jenny remembered the horrible word Aunt Beardie had used—blackmail!

Jenny was now convinced that was true; the man knew something that Lady Sherlock wished concealed—from her husband, from her family, from the world. She was probably paying him money to keep him quiet. It must be something trivial; but Mother—poor, darling sensitive Mother—she would think it was terrible. She would let it prey on her, eat into her soul and heart.

"Oh, heaven!" said Jenny aloud, as she hastened back to the Hôtel de Vernon. "What shall I do? What shall I do?"

Challenge her mother? Go to her father? Speak frankly to her uncle?

But if they all laughed at her, denied everything! It was only the evidence of the old German captain to go on. And he might after all be mistaken. She thought there was a glimmer of hope there. But his words had carried conviction. Gilles, the old servant, had thought the stranger a scoundrel. And so of course he had been, he had attached himself to these noble fugitives in order to get what he could from them, perhaps to rob them.

Where had he been all these years, why had he appeared now? Lady Sherlock commanded her own money, she would be able for a long time to supply this man with sums usually devoted to her Fulham Home. She would get deeper and deeper into his power she would be driven to despair, perhaps to self destruction.

"I'll save her. I'll defeat him!" muttered Jenny.

But how? She had no clue to go on. Impossible to trace someone who had no surname, after all those years too. Someone who would be careful not to leave any traces of himself behind. Jenny longed to confide in her uncle.

M. de Vernon took her with him to see some friends that evening—quiet, dignified people who lived in stately seclusion at Passy. They had been as children—they were her mother's contemporaries—through the Revolution. Jenny had a wild desire to ask their help, tell the whole story, put all her cards on the table, to appeal to them for guidance. But she could not bring herself to do so. She was still fumbling in the dark, and it was her mother's secret, not her own. She might make something that was already dreadful intolerable if she clumsily interfered.

The conversation turned upon Mlle de Saint-Alde and her dramatic reappearance, and great sympathy was expressed with her misfortunes, great respect for her strength of character; and there were some good-humoured, tender comments on her eccentricity—the way she was always looking out for a chance to do some little kindnesses for her friends, the habit of begging old clothes from them, her refusal to go to dressmakers, the untidiness with which she surrounded herself.

"I believe," smiled the hostess, Madame de Mortrée, "that the rooms she has in Versailles are like an old curiosity shop."

Jenny was not listening; she was trying to piece together her mother's tragedy in her mind, but suddenly a word leapt into the tangle of her complexed thoughts—Diary!—that was it! Her mother had kept a diary, and this man was in possession of it. Jenny felt as if cold fingers had put a cramping clutch over her warm flesh.

She looked across the mellow lamplight at her uncle's kindly, handsome face. He had not been deceiving her when he had spoken of her mother's happy life at Hamburg. Happy, that is, compared with what might have been...so he believed.

But what would he know? Why, nothing! He had been born while Vivienne was in exile. No doubt he was completely ignorant of whatever it was that for the last thirty ears had tormented his sister.

When Jenny returned to the Hôtel, de Vernon that night she found a letter on her dressing-table. She opened it carelessly, thinking it was from some friend or acquaintance, although she did casually notice that the paper was of very poor quality and the handwriting was thin, fine and old-fashioned.

On tearing it open she found that it contained a small portion of wrapping paper such as is used by the cheaper shops, on which was written in the same thin handwriting as had traced her name on the envelope:

> *Take care how you meddle with what does not concern you. You would be well advised to stop these investigations. By continuing them, you may put yourself and those whom you love into grave danger.*
> *A line in the 'Gazette' assuring me of your discretion would be advisable from your own point of view.*

Jenny stared at these words, not comprehending them at first, then on the maid's coming into the room, thrust the paper into her bodice.

What was it—a threat, a jest, something deadly? Was this shadow that recently had pursued her and her mother assuming a concrete shape, watching her?

She felt a start of pleasure to think that she might have drawn him away from Sherlock, that he was here in Paris, spying on her, not hidden in the Hampshire village spying on her mother She was safer here, too. She was much less likely to be noticed by her uncle and her friends than was Lady Sherlock, so conspicuous in the small village.

'What am I thinking! What am I saying!' Jenny put her hands to her flushed face. Then she thought, with a touch of ferocity: 'He is afraid of me. That advertisement in the Gazette!'

Jenny was glad, ashamed of her relief to think that Lockwood's loving eyes were not on her. It was easy casually to ask the French maid, a stranger to her, who had brought the note she had found on her table. Many letters came to the Hôtel de Vernon and were delivered by hand or by post during the day, and Jenny did not find it difficult to assume a complete indifference to this particular epistle.

The girl replied that it had been given her by one of the footmen.

The girl at once asked her to go and discover from this man who it was had sent the letter. "For," said she, with what she believed was well-feigned light indignation, "it is a rather indiscreet avowal of admiration from someone who does not know how to choose his note-paper."

The maid laughed, well used to such incidents, and in a few minutes returned and told Jenny that a street porter had delivered the letter, which had been given him by a tall dark gentleman who had stopped him at the corner of the Place Vendôme.

So this clue had come to an abrupt end, as she might have known it would. Jenny felt roused as well as indignant as if she were in touch at last with the enemy's personality. Curious how in the last few hours all her dreads and fears had taken what was almost almost a visible, shape—this man who had gone

under the name of Bernard, who was tall and dark, not ill-looking, and must now be at least about fifty years of age.

A courage and enterprise that she had not suspected she possessed rose in the young girl's heart and mind. After groping in the dark after an unknown, invisible menace she now was almost face to face with something concrete. He had offered her a link also. She remembered the 'agony' columns in the Gazette. She had laughed over them several times since she had been in Paris—those dramatic cries of affection and despair, those cryptic sentences that her uncle had told her were codes used perhaps by criminals.

She slept little that night because of frightful dreams, and the next day selected a copy of the Gazette from the pile of papers left in her uncle's study, and learned, after a keen perusal, how advertisements were inserted.

Would they put her message in without an address? She supposed there must be many people who wished to conceal their whereabouts when advertising in the newspapers.

She enclosed a money bill for far above the price of her insertion and sent it by the post. On a plain sheet of paper she had written, in what she believed was a bold, nondescript hand:

> *M. Bernard: It is you who should fear. Disappear whence you came or you will provoke a vengeance that will destroy you.*

Jenny wrote these words with such sincerity that she did not notice that they were bombastic and melodramatic, always the language of the romantic novelist of the library, sometimes only the language of genuine passion.

Jenny had trembled when she had penned the name Bernard...she felt this was a daring step to take; she might be mistaken, but she did not believe that she was, and she dared to hope that she had made a bold move that would intimidate her enemy, perhaps cause him to abandon the plot against her mother's peace.

Had she been wise? Would she be answered? Just such questions tormented her. She was very much afraid of her own inexperience. She had heard her father, her Uncle Charles, and most of their male acquaintances speak of women with a certain kindly contempt as sheltered, delicate creatures, how were they to know or judge important or dangerous affairs?

Sir Robert had always seemed slightly vexed when his wife or daughter discussed anything serious. He had discouraged Jenny from reading what he called 'dry books,' and she had early learned not to put forward many of the problems that tormented her when her father was present.

And remembering this made her tremble now at the sense of her own inadequacy. She was greatly handicapped, too, by her position. It was not very easy to go out alone save for a little while. So long as she remained in Paris her days were filled up with social duties.

If she could only put off her journey to the château de Vernon by pretending to be absorbed in visits to the milliner and dressmaker and in tea-drinking with such of her acquaintances as were still in Paris!

M. de Vernon awaited her pleasure good-humouredly enough. He was writing his Mémoires in his odd moments of leisure, and was pleased when he had a legitimate excuse to turn over the large boxes of papers and prints that his

father had left him with the request that they should one day be edited and if possible published.

But Jenny knew that she would not be able to put off her visit to Brittany much longer. Her aunt wrote pressing her to leave the hot, dusty city; her little cousins were eager to see her again—excuses would not much longer avail.

The Gazette came out twice a week and, in that event, even if her insertion went in the next issue she would have to wait at least seven days for an answer. She had signed it Mlle Geneviève; her name was common enough in Paris, since it was that of the patron saint of the city.

When her uncle took the paper and carelessly turned over the leaves, Jenny felt as if her advertisement was written in letters of flame that would blaze out and scorch him. But M. de Vernon never so much as glanced at the close-packed advertisement columns, and Jenny's first pangs of shame and dread passed into a sensation of triumph. She felt as if she had been successful in her first move, had alarmed and perhaps defeated her adversary.

When she was able to get the paper to herself and gaze at the words she had written, she thought how firm and resolute they read. Now they were arranged in print no one would be able to guess at the trembling pen by which they had been traced.

At this point, Jenny again, with much agonized debate in her mind, thought of confiding in her Uncle Charles. She again went over his good qualities—they were such as would make him an ideal friend and champion in such an affair as this.

Yet she found it impossible to break through her own sensitive reserve and to disturb his good-humoured repose, his complacent certainty that there was nothing wrong in this world, by relating to him a secret so fantastic and so dreadful.

And she soon decided that it would be not only difficult but dangerous to endeavour to share this private anguish of hers with anyone else. For while she was still fearfully regretting her inability to ask her uncle's help, Sir Francis Quarry arrived in Paris, Coming home from a walk in the Tuileries with two of her friends, she found him in the richly furnished salon. She knew from the first glance at his face that he was disturbed. At first she thought, with slight and instantly regretted contempt, 'Poor Frank, he has but little to trouble him! He is angry because he has missed a good appointment—that, and nothing more.'

But her lover's first words showed her that he was concerned with something more vital than his worldly ambition. He took her hands, and looking straight at her, said:

"Jenny, I've come to fetch you home."

She laughed; but she was a little taken aback and did not know how to meet this challenge, for such it seemed to be.

"Why, Frank! What do you mean? Before I've been to Brittany?"

"You did not come to Paris to go to Brittany," he replied. "Jenny, I know something of why you're here, something of what you're trying to do, and I've come to stop you."

Jenny, usually so composed, flushed like a rebuked child and exclaimed:

"Who could have told you?"

"Mlle de Saint-Alde told me," replied the young man. "I chanced to have leave—I returned, of course, to Sherlock to see you and found you had gone. I

thought that rather strange, you are not usually capricious, and you had said that you were not returning to Paris till the autumn."

"Leave all that," said Jenny, raising her hand and letting it fall. "What did Mlle de Saint-Alde tell you? What right has she to divulge my secret?"

"For your own good. She's a wise woman and one who admires your family and loves your mother. When I was taking my leave I met her coming up the drive. She was going to see your mother, but on perceiving me she declared she had something to say. So we walked in the grounds a little. She told me you were troubled about your mother, Jenny."

"Did she!" replied the girl. She felt angry and ashamed as if she had done wrong. Then she thought, with a sudden gleam of relief: 'Well, if Frank knows something, perhaps I should tell him all and he'll help me.'

"Yes, Jenny, she said that you had some most horrible idea in your head—that your mother was being tormented by someone from the past. That you had consulted her about it and that she had advised you to leave this dangerous fancy alone."

"It's not a dangerous fancy. It's true! I have to save Mother from something—I don't quite know what, but I'm getting nearer—Frank, will you help me?"

The young man regarded her with what she felt was a shiver of genuine horror, as if he had looked upon her in the grip of insanity or some repellent deed.

"Jenny, you don't know what you're saying. Why, these thoughts of yours evoke an appalling thought. Mlle de Saint-Alde said you thought your mother was being blackmailed. Jenny, do you know what that means?

"Yes, I do," admitted the girl, twisting her fingers in and out of one another on her lap. "But I did not say that. Mlle de Saint-Alde came to that conclusion from what I told her. But it's not so. Of course I don't believe for a moment that Mother could ever have done any wrong. I think it's someone who appeals to her pity, someone she used to know and who is now fallen in fortune."

"Jenny, if that were so," said Sir Francis sternly, "Lacy Sherlock would go to Sir Robert immediately."

"Don't speak to me so unkindly, Frank. I'm suffering extremely. Mother doesn't go to Father, does she? Whatever it is she's keeping it to herself. And I've got to help her."

"There's nothing, Jenny; Mlle de Saint-Alde assured me your mother's life in Hamburg was placid and uneventful. She was as sheltered as if she had been in France."

"Perhaps it wasn't something that happened in Hamburg," persisted Jenny. "Perhaps Mlle de Saint-Alde is trying to shield Mother. I shouldn't have said that—I don't mean shield. But she thinks it ought to be hushed up, whatever it is."

"You're talking wildly. Jenny, I would scarcely have believed this. You've been reading too many romances, or wild poetry, or been solitary too long."

"Solitary! I'm hardly ever alone," whispered Jenny, with a hunted sidelong look. "I wish I were. I've a great deal to do, Frank, I want some help. I thought of going to Father, but that's hopeless. And then to Uncle Charles—but no, that's wrong too. I wish I had a brother, but Bobby's too young. You, would you, help me?"

"With all I possess. With my life itself, in any reasonable cause. But these are just whims, some terrible phantasies you've got in your head."

"Don't keep using those words, Frank—whims, phantasies. A phantom monster! I tell you we are dealing with realities. There is a person here, a living person like ourselves. I came on him, a trace of him in the strangest way."

She related quickly what her uncle had told her of the old German sea captain and his little shop of curios and of her visit to this place and of what Henlein had told her. She believed that this recital would impress Frank, make him pity and perhaps help her; mid she looked at him with tears in her imploring eyes and her hands clasped, and in an attitude that seemed to appeal for consideration and perhaps mercy.

Sir Francis Quarry was deeply moved by this distress on the part of one whom he had always known as gay and serene. He did not, for all that, find her tale credible, and he used every means in his power to persuade her that she was the victim of a delusion. The tale of the old sea captain—why, that was nothing; he must have made up thousands of romances since he first sat in his little shop. It was well known that these survivors of the Revolution had endless anecdotes, each more grotesque than the last, with which they amused their customers.

"The very fact, Jenny, that you asked if there was anyone else on that boat would make him invent a character just to please you. If there had been such a person, and one so prominent, a man who had actually made all the arrangements for the voyage, taken an air of authority, do you suppose that your mother or Mlle de Saint-Alde would not have mentioned him?"

"There might have been good reasons why they did not," murmured Jenny. "Perhaps he is associated with something dreadful. That's' what I think, that's what I feel sure of, Frank."

"Jenny, I must ask you not to indulge in these hideous speculations. You'll lose your reason. Why, Lady Sherlock is in the best of spirits. Nobody's concerned about her save yourself. That's what Mlle de Saint-Alde told me; your mother is the happiest of women, and you are trying to bring something dark and horrible into her life."

"She seems happy to you, I suppose, but I know her better than you do, Frank. I know she's changed lately. I've seen it about her, and in the house, too. Everything seems tainted and tarnished as if there was a shadow creeping over us. You know—that kind of horrid stillness before the storm comes. When the birds cease to sing and not a blade of grass quivers."

She looked at Frank again, and this time the intensity of her appeal was painful, for she was thinking then not only of her mother, but of herself. 'Is this a man whom I can trust? Is this a man who understands me? And is this a man who will believe me?'

As she ceased, breathless, she watched keenly Sir Francis Quarry's handsome features, and as he answered coolly in a tone almost of rebuke, she felt her spirit move so far away from him that he became like a stranger.

"Certainly you must come home with me, Jenny. I cannot have you remaining in Paris, deceiving your uncle pretending you fill your time with social visits and frivolities, when in reality you are endeavouring to pursue a chimera that is entirely of your own creating. You should go to London and see Sir George Coleman and let him prescribe a course of treatment for you. Then I think you should go to Bath or Harrogate and take the waters."

Insensitive as he was, he noticed her shrink and turn her head away, and he added with a touch of compunction:

"This may seem harsh, but it is the advice that anyone who loves you would give you, Jenny. Believe me, there is nothing in this monstrous fable that you are telling me."

Jenny thought: 'I could show him the letter, I wonder what he'd say about that. But I won't. And of course he'd refuse to credit it, he'd perhaps think I'd written it myself. And then he'd have me watched. I should have to tell him that I'd put an insertion in the Gazette and he'd watch for the reply. No, Frank is no friend of mine. Why, is it possible that only a little while ago I thought I could marry him?'

A sense of loneliness overcame her like a biting wind. She rose, and though the room was clearly lit with crystal chandeliers it seemed to fall in darkness about her small, helpless body.

"Will you come home with me, Jenny? I must return tomorrow."

This man who she had so briefly and foolishly hoped would become her champion was now her adversary in Jenny's mind. She made a swift calculation of their several positions and asked over her shoulder:

"What will you do if I refuse to return to England with you, Frank?"

"I think I ought to tell your father, or your uncle—he's next nearly concerned. Perhaps it would be kinder to warn him than Sir Robert."

Jenny was silent for a moment in pure anguish. Frank's blundering hand in this, Frank's mistaken sense of honour and responsibility. She felt no resentment towards poor old Aunt Beardie, who, no doubt, had most clearly felt it was her duty to warn the young man of what his betrothed wife was undertaking. No time now to puzzle out Aunt Beardie's attitude...perhaps she knew a great deal about the affair and that it might be very perilous to interfere with it...perhaps on the other hand she knew nothing and thought Jenny really was deceived—the victim, perhaps, of girlish hysteria. Jenny's immediate concern was Frank. She said:

"Frank, do you still want to marry me, and in October?"

"Jenny, you know I do!" There was no mistaking the sincerity in his voice. "I want you! I need you, Jenny, as I never wanted anyone else. I'm not able to make any words about it, I don't suppose I've been a very romantic sort of lover, perhaps you've missed that—"

"No," she interrupted again, raising her hand and letting it fall. "No! Go on, Frank."

"Well, I've kept away from you a good deal because I thought that's what you wished. I knew you shrank from leaving your mother, your home—you are such an exceptionally happy family, Jenny. But I've loved you, dear, always, and I love you still. I'm a good deal older than you and I can't believe there'll ever be anyone else. This is not a boy's fancy, Jenny."

"I respect it, Frank, and I'll marry you in October, if you'll be quiet about this—what shall we call it?—idea of mine. If you won't tell my father or Uncle Charles."

"What's your reason for asking that, Jenny?' demanded Sir Francis.

"Can't you see? I don't want Mother to be hurt."

"I don't think either your your father or your uncle would go to Lady Sherlock with a tale like that."

"You can't tell. Besides, it's something I can't bear to talk about. I'm sorry I mentioned it to you just now."

"I can't make a bargain with you, Jenny, about anything so important—to me, at least—as our marriage. But if you ask me, I'll keep silent. But I want a promise from you too."

"Yes, Frank?"

"I want you to promise that you'll forget this foolishness, this horror that you've allowed to take possession of yourself. I don't know what you're trying to do in Paris, if you're trying to trace anyone, if you're making inquiries. Of course, you won't be able to do much, you're too guarded, thank heaven."

"No, I shan't be able to do much," repeated Jenny, looking on the floor. "I'm watched day and night—maids, friends. Uncle Charles. And soon my aunt too—I'm going to Brittany next week. I can't make a bargain either, Frank, but you must trust me as I trust you."

"But I do want a promise, Jenny. I want you to promise to forget it."

"I'll try to forget it. But remember, Frank, if you do say one word, or start any suspicions at home, I shall not be able to endure to look upon you again."

His face became disagreeable, his eyes narrowed, she saw that she had hit him hard and rejoiced, almost cruelly, in her power over him. She saw that rigid as was his sense of right and wrong, fear of losing her might make him deviate from his code. She knew that he would be silent.

"If you get an opportunity of talking to poor Aunt Beardie," she added smiling, for she felt that she had gained the advantage in this argument, "reassure her. Tell her that I'm not thinking any more about it. She has enough sad memories of her own without concerning herself about me."

"Yes, I'll give her that message," said Sir Frank eagerly, "if you mean it, Jenny."

"I most seriously mean it," replied Jenny sombrely. "If you say a word, give a hint, of this delusion of mine to anyone, I shall feel you are my enemy, Frank."

With that he had to be content, and soon after he had to leave her, for only at great cost and trouble had he been able to undertake this brief journey to Paris.

When Sir Frank had gone, Jenny wept. Something had gone out of her life—her lover! This was her first sacrifice in the task she had undertaken. Had not this happened she might never have known that he was a man who would fail her in an emergency, a man who could not understand her, one who would be conventional, insensitive, even dull.

Yes, poor Frank, for all his good looks, fine manners, his keen ambition and his good pleasant qualities, was dull, obtuse. He had never noticed that Lady Sherlock was changed; he had never noticed that Jenny was in earnest. Had he come forward then and offered to help her, in secrecy, faithfully, she would have discovered that she loved him, she would have been true to him for the rest of her life.

But now it was over. She might marry him in the autumn—two months away, that autumn!—if he demanded that, if he kept her secret loyally, she might feel bound to do so, but she knew him once and for all to be a man she could never love.

But this problem seemed a long way off, and she did not concern herself much about that. It was the present and the immediate future that weighed on her with so heavy a burden.

Sir Frank's visit caused no surprise to M. de Vernon; it was put down to a lover's ardour; Jenny was smilingly congratulated upon the handsome and

well-bred Englishman with such fine prospects who was so profoundly in love with her.

Jenny hardly heard what her uncle said, she could scarcely bring herself to join in the chatter of friends whom she met at the cool salon of the Hôtel de Vernon or the other houses to which she accompanied her uncle.

Paris was becoming emptier every day, she was being pressed to fix the date for her departure to Brittany and all her debate was—how could she obtain freedom, how get a few days to herself? What exactly she would be able to do with that liberty should she obtain it she did not yet know, but it was her constant, her intense desire.

She felt the life that had been hers until now artificial, burdensome, exasperating. What was the sense of this round of puerile pleasures, this idle talk, these constant visits to the dressmaker and the milliner, this purchase of unnecessary articles of luxury?

Not only did she no longer find any enjoyment in these occupations, but they irked her, sometimes almost beyond her powers of concealment.

She lost interest even in her kind uncle, in the Hôtel de Vernon which she had known all her life, in her agreeable friends and acquaintances, in the charming sights of Paris. She wanted to cast all this aside and devote herself to searching out and destroying her mother's enemy.

Under pretence of delayed fittings for a gown, she had the flounces that were perfectly correct taken off and put on again several times, and reminding herself of Penelope's tapestry web, she contrived to delay the journey to Brittany until the issue of the Gazette appeared that would have, she hoped, the message from her enemy.

She could not tell why she supposed that he would wish to keep in touch with her, but she did believe that he feared her. They had entered into a battle, and thus, without betraying himself, he would let her know something of his attitude, something perhaps of his plan.

There was an answer to Mlle Geneviève.

> *"If this young lady will visit the chemist's shop of M. Follope in the town of Versailles, she may perhaps be able to satisfy her curiosity."*

Jenny's immediate impulse was to go at once to Versailles and investigate the clue thus offered to her. Then her quick intelligence warned her that the message might not even be meant for her. She looked at the paper again—the name Bernard to which she had addressed her insertion was not mentioned.

Geneviève, why, it was common enough! Perhaps this advertisement, which seemed so incoherent, so grotesque, was not intended for her at all. Perhaps the man to whom she had addressed her threat had not answered.

A hundred perplexities tormented her. If only she had been in her mother's confidence... Lady Sherlock wrote affectionate letters and appeared completely candid, but never touched on her secret troubles.

'I wish I knew,' thought Jenny, 'if she is being persecuted and if that man is still at Sherlock. Of course he cannot be, it must be he who sent me the note. But I suppose he could get to and from France easily and quickly enough if he wished to.',

There was no question of Jenny's endeavouring to go to Versaille's to investigate the house of M. Follope the chemist, for she could not delay the

journey to Brittany any longer without attracting attention to her reluctance to leave Paris, and this she by no means wished to do.

She felt that her time in Paris had been largely wasted. She had paid another visit to the old German sea captain to buy some of his curios, and of course he had been eager to talk of the courageous adventure in which he had acted as her mother's heroic protector.

He mentioned M. Bernard in the course of this extravagant narrative, that name which had now so sinister a meaning for Jenny. But she dare not question him closely about this mysterious personage. The sea captain had already declared that he knew nothing more than what he had told her before, and she dare not attract attention to her intense interest in this young man who had stepped on board the German boat at St. Malo a generation ago.

Her cool clear mind recalled Sir Frank's warning, his rejection of all the old sea captain's highly coloured tales, and she was forced to admit that he rambled a good deal in his talk and that much that he said was unlikely, almost impossible.

Yet she came away from her second visit to the little dark shop sunk under the overhanging storeys, the ship in the bottle as a sign above the door with the clanging bell, unconvinced that all was a chimera.

She found when she reached the château de Vernon that she looked at it with different eyes. She remembered with an indescribable pang that she was almost exactly the age that her mother had been when she had returned from Hamburg to her home, and she had a bewildering and sickening sensation of having lost her own identity. She thought, as she stepped out of the coach on that August evening, that she was the young exile returned after many years abroad, the girl who had left her home as a happy child and had returned to it as a young woman, with what experience, with what memories, behind her...

Jenny mechanically returned the affectionate greetings of her aunt and little cousins, who had been allowed to stay up to greet her, and looked up with a gaze that seemed as if she wished to engrave the scene upon her heart, at the stiff yet gracious outline of the château against the fading sky. So her mother must have looked, so surrounded with love and friendship her mother must have re-entered her childhood home...

The furniture, heavy, old-fashioned, could have been but little changed. The first fire of the year had been lit under the huge covered chimney-piece, the sweet nostalgic odour of burning wood pierced Jenny's senses. It was dark in the large hall, the portraits on the walls receded into the shadows, only here and there a pale face, a white collar, a gleaming eye showed.

'All my ancestors and hers,' thought Jenny.

Family pride had always been strong in her, pride mole in her noble Breton descent than her father's good English stock. She knew that her mother had deeply concealed the intense pride of race so irrational yet not to be despised, the feeling that brought Jenny nearer to her uncle than to her father...nearer almost to her uncle's children than to her own brother and sister.

She passed the evening as if in a light delirium, playing her part without fault, with her thoughts and her spirit far away.

After supper she asked her aunt:

"Might I have my mother's room, not that which you usually give me, though it is so charming?"

"Your mother's room, Jenny? What do you mean, dear?" asked Madame de Vernon tenderly.

"I mean the room she had when she returned from Hamburg I suppose it's still known."

"Oh yes," said M. de Vernon, who was standing by. "Your mother had that room until she married. Since then it's been shut up, I don't quite know why."

"It was always her room?" asked Jenny.

"Oh yes, since she was a child. It is quite a delightful chamber with some fine pieces in it. Of course you can sleep there if you like, Jenny."

"I would have given it you before if I had known," smiled Madame de Vernon. But Jenny knew that they had not given her the room because they did not wish the shadow of an old sorrow to fall over her. She knew that when her mother had first returned from exile she had lived very quietly, almost a recluse, and had contemplated entering a nunnery.

"Mother doesn't have that room now when she comes to Vernon, does she?" asked Jenny.

"No, darling. I give her that bright chamber facing south, for she is so fond of the sun."

But Jenny knew again without being told that this room dedicated to the long reserve of a wounded spirit, had been shut up as if it had been a sacred shrine, not to be profaned by a casual visitor. She knew, too, that it was given to her now in the full understanding that she was possessed by her mother's story. Her uncle, her mother's brother, and his charming and lovely wife, had that sensitiveness that Sir Robert and Sir Frank Quarry both lacked. There was no need for her to tell them that she felt as if she were her mother, who a generation ago had thus returned to Vernon.

Her uncle pressed a glass of champagne on her, and then another, declaring that she looked fatigued after the long journey from Paris. And Jenny felt light-headed from the wine and her own emotion when at length she could escape from the affection of the family and close herself in the chamber that had been her mother's.

She had passed the door often enough, but never entered. It had been prepared for her only within the last hour or so. The fine linen sheets and pillow-cases, the late roses in the crystal vases, the wood fire crackling in the hearth did not disturb the atmosphere of this still chamber that had not been slept in during the whole of her lifetime.

Jenny was enclosed alone in this room as if she were enclosed alone in another world—that of her mother's life. She had lately realized keenly the artificiality of her own existence—everything about her, everything that had ever happened to her was too sweet, too pleasant, and meant really nothing. She was sheltered from all contact with reality by her sex and her position, the pride, the possessions of the family into which she had been born.

Now, absorbed in her mother's tragedy and her mother's past, she was able to strip herself of all these externals, to feel as her mother must have felt when she found herself alone in Hamburg, unprotected save by the charity of a stranger, exposed to the indifference, perhaps to the cruelty, of a world where she was unknown, where everyone felt nothing but indifference towards the lost fugitive.

Any contrast between her mother's youth and her own might seem fantastic, but Jenny realized that her own position was something the same. She was

alone, everyone about her was indifferent to her trouble, she had no one and nothing on whom she could rely save herself. It was true she had no need, as Aunt Beardie and Frank Quarry had both told her, to concern herself with these distresses. She could pretend to ignore her mother's uneasiness, lie to herself about the two appearances of the stranger and the note she had received in Paris—all could be explained away, no doubt. She believed that many young women in her position would thus hurriedly and shamefacedly thrust them away and shrink back into the warm shelter of their own comforts.

But if Jenny had realized the brittle triviality of the world in which she moved, she had also realized the strength of her own character. She was not one to be deceived nor turned aside from any objective she had in view. And in the few months since this mystery had begun to disturb her, it had, gradually increasing day by day, come to absorb most of her waking hours and all of her dreams.

She drew a sharp breath, and going to the window, moved back the heavy curtains from the damp night. There were a few stars faintly twinkling through a thick mist and, seeming more of the earth than of the heavens, they appeared to be caught in the upper boughs of the trees where the leaves were already beginning to fall.

It was on this sight that her mother must have looked, for she, Jenny knew, had re, turned from Germany in the month of September—it was the last day of August now.

She dropped the curtain again over the quiet prospect and turning back into the room took her lamp and went round from one piece of furniture to another, holding her light above her head and looking long and earnestly at chairs, presses, cabinets, and the heavy bedstead with the old-fashioned tester to which were attached by ebony rings curtains of a heavy slightly faded prune-coloured silk lined with white satin.

She opened one of the wall cupboards and almost shrank back, it was so large. It might have been a small room, it could have accommodated several people standing upright, even a bed.

Jenny smiled wryly at her own nervousness. A few dresses were hanging up in the corner of the immense cupboard, and Jenny shone the lamp on them—some muslin, yellowing from being kept in the dark, a glitter of stiff silk, blue with tarnished gold tassels, an Andalusian shawl like that which Aunt Beardie wore.

'I wonder why they kept these,' thought jenny. 'They're Mother's—I suppose she left them behind when she got married.'

She took the clothes out tenderly, one by one. They had been looked after and smelt of lavender and cedar-oil with which they had been sprinkled in order to keep away the moths. Her mother's name, finely embroidered on little oblongs of linen, was sewn inside each gown—'Vivienne de Vernon.' This name seemed to Jenny to reach again her mother's youth—Vivienne de Vernon was not the same woman as Lady Sherlock. The woman she had left behind in Sherlock Hall was not the same as the woman who had worn these gowns.

Carefully, and sighing a little, she returned them to the closet. Then with a guilty sense, yet urged on by a fierce curiosity, she searched in the pockets.

In one was a thimble, silver, with a gilt border on which was painted a small wreath of roses. In another a lace handkerchief, chill and crumpled; in another a packet of papers.

Jenny closed the door of the closet cupboard and took the papers to the table where she set the lamp. She was prying, almost spying, on her mother, seeking to ferret out her secret. These thoughts ran with a swift self-disgust through her mind, but she did not hesitate.

Out of the envelope, stiff and crackling with age, she drew papers on which her mother's familiar hand showed in faded ink.

They were not letters, but notes. Jenny sat down at the table and perused them steadily. At first she could make nothing of them—a column of figures, sums, calculations of expenses, a rough drawing that seemed to be the plan of a house. Written at random across the paper were odd words—pray and forget repeated again and again. On the back of one of the sheets was written, Never to marry, never to have children. Then, repeated many times, expiation.

Jenny sighed, unpleasantly interested. Then turning over another page, the puzzle was solved. Her mother had written at the top in a clear bold hand, Plan for a Home for Lost Women. Of course, her Fulham Charity!

Jenny put the papers down in the ring of light cast by the lamb. So her mother had been thinking of that when she was a girl. By the look of the paper and ink these plans must have been drawn up many years ago, perhaps immediately after her return from Hamburg.

Before she allowed herself to think about them, Jenny folded them up, and rising, opened the cupboard and returned them to the pocket of the gown from which she had taken them.

A train of sombre thought had been started in her mind by this discovery that could not be stilled. She had always taken for granted her mother's charity that was so little spoken of at Sherlock, but she had gathered from chance words, glances and silences—as children will—when she was very young, that her father did not very greatly approve of this charity of her mother's and that he certainly did not wish her—Jenny—or her sister to be involved in it. Miss Prescott had never said very much about it, although she had informed them all when they were children that their mother gave all her private means to poor, wretched, unfortunate people in London..

They had all become used to this and had not given it much thought; but when she had grown older, Jenny had asked her mother several questions about her charities, and Lady Sherlock had put her off. But finally she had told her, definitely, that her father did not wish her to be concerned with it, However, on Jenny's pressing the point, Lady Sherlock had said that the home was for poor girls and women who had lost their characters and could not find work. She had them taught trades or fitted for employment and gave them' a home where they could regain their self-respect. These conventional words were all that Lady Sherlock could be induced to say about the work to which she gave so much of her time and almost all, Jenny understood, of her money.

Once when she had been in London, Jenny, always spirited and strong-willed, had entreated her mother to take her to see this home at Fulham; but Lady Sherlock had refused, nervously and passionately for a while, then suddenly surrendered, saying: "After all, what harm will it do? It is a very quiet and respectable place. You will see nothing, Jenny, but diligence and industry."

So the two ladies had gone in the light summer carriage, for it was a hot August day, to the old house by the river that Lady Sherlock had had modernized. It was surrounded by high brick walls and there was a porter at the tall plain iron gates.

Jenny put her hand before her eyes, shading them from the light of the lamp, as this scene came clearly before her mental vision.

It had happened about two years ago, but she could remember it all distinctly, though at the time the visit did not seem to her very important or very interesting. Indeed, she had been rather disappointed when her curiosity had been satisfied. What was there to see after all? Two wings had been built on to the central house, which was stately and commodious and had been the residence of a merchant prince a hundred years before.

The matron came forward into the porch and received the two ladies; first they went into the parlour where they had a glass of sherry and a few biscuits. Lady Sherlock began to talk over the business of the establishment with the matron; books were taken out, accounts read over, some business discussed in low tones.

Jenny stared out of the window. There was a fair-sized garden at the back with a washhouse and a bakery. Women in print gowns and round caps were moving to and fro; they had simple cotton shawls crossed over their bosoms. All of them were young and several of them were exceedingly pretty. The rich and graceful lines of their voluptuous figures showed through the common clothes, rich locks, of golden hair fell beneath the demure caps. Some were seated on stools sewing in the sun, some were spinning, one was hanging out wet garments on a rope line.

Jenny wondered idly in what way these girls had "lost their characters." Were they thieves, pickpockets? She supposed so. How was it they were not in prison? But perhaps they had been in prison and her mother looked after them when they came out; strange, all of it, bewildering and distasteful.

The scene was placid, even drab and commonplace; and Jenny, who detested ugliness, wished she had not insisted on coming with her mother on this visit.

She moved away from the window into the bright little parlour, and heard the matron say: "It is a question of the child."

Lady Sherlock had risen at once when her daughter had moved, and gathered up her parasol, gloves and reticule; Jenny had an unaccountable wave of nervous terror; even all her training barely sufficed to prevent her from crying out: "Mother, take me away! This is horrible!"

A sense of panic gripped her until they had passed through the gates and were in the familiar carriage again driving back towards the town house in Red Lion Square.

Then once more in the fresh air and alone with her mother, the girl had wondered at her own sense of terror, that wave of nausea which had almost overwhelmed her spirits.

"Who were those women, Mother?" she had asked, and Lady Sherlock had answered quietly: "They're poor girls—servants or workers in factories, ill paid and ill fed. They come up from the country, too, to look for adventure in London. And then they fall into bad company, Jenny, and they break the law. They do not know how to look after themselves, they become ill and dirty and degraded. And I take them and try to look after them a little."

"I'm sure you're very kind, but I did not like the look of that place."

"Don't speak of it again," said Lady Sherlock quickly, and with an air of authority, "it is my affair, Jenny, my concern entirely. As you say, it is dreary. Pray don't let the shadow of it come over your life."

Jenny had been very glad to put the matter out of her mind, but now that visit came back to her.

She understood better what those women were and the sins and failures that brought them to that pass. How close to her mother's heart this work must be, since she had been planning it even before she was married! Jenny could again see that August sunlight on those brick walls, and the women in their white print gowns standing about in little silent groups and her own sudden panic as if something sinister had thrown a gloom over that tranquillity.

And her thoughts wandered down dark and melancholy ways. How little she knew of life, of human violence and of lust, of human filth and piteous degradation! Frank Quarry had been right when he had told her that she knew nothing, that she was romantic, that she had read too many novelettes from the circulating libraries. She had been kept like one of the peaches that grew on the sunny wall of the garden at Sherlock Hall, protected from everything but fine weather, and when finally plucked wrapped in cotton wool for fear of a bruise. People kept things from her, she was surrounded with men and women who concealed their secrets. Her own mother, perhaps her own father also, Mlle de Saint-Alde with her terrible adventures, Frank too—he must know something of human violence, brutality and crude passion of which she was quite unaware. Her own inexperience seemed to wither her courage. She felt a fool who was sure to make mistakes.

Why did her mother run that Home and seem to spend on it all her money? Why had her mother been interested in Honoria Perry—the pretty, cheerful woman to whom she had lent the Dower House, about whom there had been so many whispers on the staircase, so many glances in the lanes, and who had disappeared without any farewells?

Jenny put out the lamp, lit one candle and undressed slowly, shuddering each time one of her garments fell on the shining floor.

She believed she was repeating, action for action, what her mother had done when she had first slept in this room on her return from Hamburg.

As she mounted the bed-step she had an uncontrollable instinct to fall on her knees; she did not know what to say, but all her being seemed to go up in a prayer to some dark tremendous Power.

What had her mother written over those pages of calculations and figures?—Prayer. Pardon. Never to marry, never to have children. If she referred to herself—But she did marry and she had a child...she had me.'

Jenny climbed into bed; the sheets were cool about her, the starched linen had a polish like porcelain. She had opened the shutters and drawn back the curtains, and the misty light from without fell in a faint blue shaft in the shadows of the room. The tester of the bed was dark over her, in a darkness like a suspended cloud.

She sank into the pillows, her body weary, her mind active. She believed she had almost reached the point where her individuality fused with that of her mother. She could understand now what her mother had felt a generation ago when she had come home to sleep in this bed.

With what memories?

'I have been asleep,' thought Jenny, 'but now I begin to wake. Mother was not safe and happy in Hamburg, she does not tell the truth about that. Neither does old Aunt Beardie.'

How was it she had resolved to found a Home for those wretched, lost women? How was it she knew about them? Jenny, whose natural squeamishness had been fostered by the elegant life she had always led, felt sick as she had felt sick that day at the Fulham Home... She tried to check her thoughts, to think of the future, how she was going to help her mother.

What was the 'next clue? The chemist's shop kept by M. Follope in Versailles? The advertisement had been intended for her, and said that there she would be able to satisfy her curiosity. Perhaps it was a trap! She would be a fool to go alone, unprotected, but she had no protector.

She sat up on the pillows in the dark in the misery of her impotence. How ironical was her situation! She was so guarded and looked after that all liberty was denied her, but when she really required help and protection she could not obtain it from anyone.

After a restless night of agonized sleeplessness she dozed before the dawn. The cool wind that came with the rising sun and dispersed the mists, blew through the opened window shutters and curtains on her face and refreshed her. But her half-waking dreams were not pleasant.

She felt that she was in the city that had been so much in her mind recently—Hamburg, a dark place of straight, mud-coloured houses, situated on the shores of a black harbour pool filled with gigantic, gloomy shipping. And she, knowing herself small, helpless like a leaf blown before the wind, was hurrying along those blank streets with her hair streaming behind her, the strings of her cloak tugging at her throat—searching for whom, for what? For her mother, for her other self?

She found herself beating on the door of one of the tallest houses, The windows were blank and unshuttered and an unnatural light glittered on the polished panes of glass.

The loneliness was intolerable, but she knew that she dreaded lest this loneliness should be broken by the appearance of some dreadful stranger.

There was no answer to her knocking; she heard it echoing hollowly through empty rooms.

The wind increased and pulled at her skirts and her hair, drew her shawl out be hind her. She ran away from the house when her knocking was not answered, up the dun-coloured streets. A perpetual twilight seemed over the city, but one light gleamed dully. It was in the window of a chemist's shop, and there Jenny paused and looked at the poppy-heads, the jars of green and blue glass in which stars of reflected light winked feebly. She could see in the shop the worn counter with the heavy pestle and mortar and a pair of scales. An old man was sitting there—she could sec only the top of his bald head. Was he human, waxwork, or dead?

Jenny turned in her bed with a moan that wakened her. She sat up, sweat starting her forehead.

A dream, but one that would remain with her for a long while, one that would tarnish for her for ever the city of Hamburg, any chemist's shop. A dream, but founded upon reality; Hamburg was likely to haunt her—the name, the place, and there was a certain chemist's shop that she must visit. But how? The question was a perpetual torment.

She forced herself to get through the day with apparent cheerfulness. M. de Vernon's family was like her own in that all the members of it were so content and easy-going that they did not suspect anything sinister or evil. Jenny would

have had to behave very strangely indeed before they guessed that she was troubled in any way whatsoever.

To her uncle and her aunt she seemed as happy as she was fortunate. They believed that she loved Frank Quarry as much as a well-bred girl should love her future husband, and they had no doubt at all of the quality of his emotion for her. They therefore regarded her as a fortunate young woman whose future was most advantageously settled.

A letter from Lady Sherlock had followed Jenny to the château de Vernon. She opened it without much interest; she knew that her mother always wrote in guarded, conventional terms—full of tenderness and affection, no doubt, but these had become meaningless to Jenny since she had been on the track of this bitter mystery that enveloped her mother and was now likely to envelop herself.

There was only one line in Lady Sherlock's letter that was of any interest to her daughter, and that was that Aunt Beardie had gone to London and might soon return to Paris. 'She was happy here, but very restless. The children miss her a great deal,' Lady Sherlock wrote.

Aunt Beardie! After all, if she could see the formidable old woman again, she might be able to persuade her to offer some assistance, perhaps, if she were to tell her what the German captain had said of 'M. Bernard,' of the two insertions in the Gazette, and the anonymous letter.

The more she thought over this project the more helpful it appeared. If Mlle de Saint-Alde offered her help, that would be a solution to the worst of her difficulties. Her family would not object to her going anywhere or doing anything in the company of that stern and respectable victim of the Revolution.

She therefore at once wrote to her mother suggesting that if Aunt Beardie came to Paris she should visit her there. But Jenny waited in vain for a reply to this letter. Two mail days passed and there was no news from Sherlock Hall; and she could no longer endure her own restlessness, the extraordinary sensation of sleeping in her mother's room, living again—as she believed she did live—her mother's girlhood. She asked her uncle where Mlle de Saint-Alde lived when in Paris, and he said that he believed the strange old lady still had an apartment in Versailles—not in the château where she might have resided had she chosen, but in the town.

In Versailles! How marvellously that fitted into Jenny's plans. If she could contrive by any excuse to pay a visit to Aunt Beardie at Versailles she would be able also to visit M. Follope's chemist's shop and see whether or not it had anything to do with the mystery she was trying to investigate.

This enforced lull in her plans had discouraged the girl deeply, had begun to shake her health so that even her good-humoured, complacent relatives noticed it. They advised that she should return home, much as they would miss her dear company.

Jenny was hesitant. If she returned to England she would miss all chances of following up those clues, poor as they were, that she had discovered in France. But she might as well be at Sherlock Manor House as at the château de Vernon, helpless, watched, although by kind unconscious eyes, unable to take the smallest step to secure a solution of the puzzle.

But while she was thus miserably undecided, tormenting herself with the thought that the unknown enemy was gaining a deeper hold over her mother, that Lady Sherlock was living in daily and nightly terror from the menaces of the man whom Jenny had twice half seen, the difficulty was solved by Aunt

Beardie herself who drove up one afternoon in late September to the château de Vernon in a hired carriage with a small quantity of baggage.

Although her arrival had been totally unexpected, she was received with frank pleasure and warm hospitality. M. de Vernon could never forget that this eccentric old woman was the daughter of the man who had saved his sister's life and protected her when she had been in extreme peril. Besides, Mlle de Saint-Alde was liked for her own odd graces and vivid personality, for her tricks and quips and sharp sayings and pleasant humour.

She was soon installed in the château, seeming as much a part of the household as if she had never left it. But she told her host and hostess that she had not come for a long stay.

"It seems that I have been a wanderer too long," she said, with a wry smile, "to be able to settle down anywhere now. I wanted to see you all again, for I am very fond of you all, and who knows when an old woman may pass to her fathers? No sentiment about that, my dears. I've had my life and lived it."

M. de Vernon asked the downright old lady why she did not take up her abode in the suite of apartments that had been given her at the château at Versailles, and she replied, justly enough, Jenny thought, that the Palace, for so long deserted, was now but a gloomy place, more like a tomb than a place of residence, and haunted, as she declared, by ghosts of murdered men and women.

"No, no, I have my own little rooms where I keep my few possessions. I fear they are in a good deal of confusion. One of these days one of you, my kind friends, must come up there and help me to tidy them."

Jenny caught at this opportunity.

"I would, Aunt Beardie. I'm going home soon, perhaps I could come to Versailles on the way. I could stop in Paris at the Hôtel de Vernon, and so could you."

"Why, I dare say it could be arranged." Aunt Beardie smiled indulgently. "You are a little restless, too, are you not, Jenny, my love?"

Feeling that her aunt was glancing at her as Mlle Saint-Alde spoke, Jenny thought desperately of a time-honoured excuse. She declared that her teeth had been troubling her and that she wished to visit the dentist in Paris.

"Besides, I really must go home."

"Why, if you're to be married in October, you ought to be home by the end of September," smiled her aunt.

"Oh no, I'm not going to marry in October—that's been postponed. It will be the spring, if any time. I've written to Frank and explained. He's in Berlin, you know. And Mother, Fanny and Bobby will, I hope, be visiting me in Paris—Father, perhaps, too."

So, after a few days' leisurely discussion—maddeningly slow to Jenny—the matter was arranged.

She was to return to Paris with Aunt Beardie, who had come to Brittany for a week only; they were to stay for the night in the Hôtel de Vernon, and then they were to go to Versailles for the day when Jenny would help the old lady to put her possessions in order.

Mlle de Saint-Alde had now offered an explanation of how she came to have so many family treasures. When she had returned to France—she was vague as to the exact date of this event—an old friend of her father's, since dead, had delivered to her several cases of goods that had been safely stored in the bank

of which M. de Saint-Alde had formerly been a director. These Estienne de Saint-Alde had taken at once to the rooms that she had hired in Versailles and there they had been ever since, together with such possessions as she had brought back with her from her various travels.

"To tell the truth," said M. de Vernon, when the old lady had gone to bed, and he, his wife and Jenny were sitting round the fire in the large salon, "our dear old friend is a little mysterious. I should be sorry to have to put together date by date her story of her adventures. But then, it is only to be expected. She has undergone many strange experiences, and is exceedingly confused."

"She is very rigid and proper in her ideas, she has lost nothing of her one-time decorum;" said Madame de Vernon. "I feel quite safe in entrusting Jenny to her for the few days she will be in Paris."

Jenny did not answer; she felt slightly ashamed, since her intention was to evade her guardian and thus gain a few hours' precious liberty in which to visit the chemist's shop in Versailles.

She felt ashamed, too, of the pleasure she experienced at the thought of being able so soon to leave the château de Vernon. How extraordinary that Aunt Beardie should have appeared at this moment and offered her an opportunity of freedom when this had seemed impossible even to hope for! She knew the queer old woman to be indulgent in her ideas of liberty for the young; she was exceedingly up to date in some of her notions, and not nearly so precise and particular as was Lady Sherlock on the little points of etiquette and decorum, though Jenny had never known the old lady to be other than well bred.

So the girl, impatient to be at the work that had absorbed her mind for so long, was much relieved to think that she had this opportunity of going not only to Paris but even to Versailles itself with Mlle de Saint-Alde.

Why, with the greatest ease in the world she would be able to find out M. Follope's shop and investigate what possible clue to what possible mystery might be found there! Yet it was with a certain pang that she said goodbye to her kind relatives. She had not been able this time to appreciate the peace and dignity of life at the château de Vernon. She had lived there too much under the shadow of her mother's own youth and her mother's own homecoming a generation ago.

When she stepped into that chamber where her mother had slept and no doubt wept and prayed and sat brooding over the future, the charming atmosphere of the house seemed banished, and Jenny was gathered away into old miseries and aching, fading sorrows.

Her acute mind tried to put a check on her overflowing emotions. She was aware that she might perhaps be self-deceived and that there had been, after all, no trouble in her mother's early life and that the affair that now threatened to envelop her entire mind and heart was a mere phantom of her own imagination.

Her uncle and her aunt were sorry to see her go. She believed that they were slightly uneasy about her, as if they had sensed her mental state, although she had been very careful not to betray any of this, or so she thought. Madame de Vernon insisted on her own confidential Breton maid, Germaine, accompanying Jenny. Mlle de Saint-Alde's services to the family gave her the standing of an old and entirely trusted friend. But for all that, Madame de Vernon did not entirely approve of the eccentricities of the formidable old woman. She thought

that Jenny would be happier and more comfortable if she were not entirely at the mercy of mademoiselle's caprices, but under the care of an old and trusted servant—a woman of mature age and considerable experience.

Aunt Beardie appeared to welcome this acquisition to the party. She said that the presence of Germaine would make her independent of the indifferent services of hired maids or chambermaids at the hôtels where they must rest.

So the three women set off in the rather modest but comfortable coach that Mlle de Saint-Alde had hired, with Germaine on the seat beside the driver and the two ladies comfortably settled inside. The autumn winds were beginning to become chill and the thick, melancholy mists hung over the countryside, blotting out the familiar shapes as Jenny took her leave of the château de Vernon.

With the inevitable sorrow that comes from parting from those who are dear and kind, she looked out of the window to have the last possible glimpse of the group standing in the château doorway smiling their pleasant fare wells. But the mists came down quickly like a curtain and soon shut the scene completely from sight.

"You'll miss your friends," remarked Mlle de Saint-Alde, with sympathy. "You'll be homesick, I dare say, as soon as you are in Paris."

Jenny thought that any weakness such as homesickness would soon be overshadowed by the task she had set herself. She shook her head without replying, and taking off her bonnet with an impatient yet half-unconscious movement, hung it by its strings to her arm and leaned her head back against the cushion of dark-purple velvet that her Aunt Hélène had given her at the last moment.

She sat with her back to the horses in order to give Mlle de Saint-Alde the entire seat, which she indeed seemed to require with her flowing shawl, voluminous skirt, her large reticule packed with papers and the various valises and bandboxes that she carried about with her and seemed to wish to keep always under her personal care.

She now took out a length of black silk and began to tat it rapidly in order to beguile the weariness of the monotonous journey, rendered the more tedious by the curtain of fog that fell either side of the windows and the consequent extreme slowness of their progress, as the driver guided his horses carefully along the mist-obscured roads.

Jenny looked at her companion nervously, anxiously revolving in her mind whether or no she should take her into her confidence for the second time. Perhaps now that she had so much more information to give her, surely even the shrewd and suspicious old woman would accept it, for in spite of the rouge on her cheek-bones, and the thick lenses of her steel-rimmed spectacles which concealed her eyes, the lines of the face were good, even handsome, and showed, Jenny thought, dignity and character.

'After all,' thought Jenny, 'I can't lose anything by this step, except that she may think me a fool and that won't much matter.'

So before they had gone very far and after a few commonplaces had been exchanged between them about the inconvenience of the weather and the time the journey was likely to take, Jenny said suddenly:

"Mlle de Saint-Alde, you remember what I told you about my mother?"

"I remember it quite well. It was such an extraordinary thing I am not likely to forget it." Aunt Beardie's gaunt fingers moved rapidly to and fro with her tatting-hook and length of black silk. She wore, as usual, thick mittens.

"I know you thought I was very foolish," said Jenny, "but something further has happened and I must tell you about it."

"Have you told your uncle and aunt?" asked Mlle de Saint-Alde. "The fog is getting into the coach," she added, with a touch of irritation, "I am hoarser than ever today. My cough is absolutely tormenting me."

"No, I haven't told them. I can't explain why I confide in you and not in them. I suppose it's because you're the only person who actually remembers Mother when she was young."

"Well, what is it you want to confide in me?" Aunt Beardie spoke hoarsely after her outburst of coughing and she fumbled in her reticule for a box of pastilles.

Jenny told her briefly about what she had learned from the German sea captain, of the note and of her insertion in the newspaper and its reply.

She was intensely relieved, though slightly mortified, when Mlle de Saint-Alde gave her deep, hearty laugh at the conclusion of this timid and broken recital.

"That 'M. Bernard,' as he called himself—why, I remember him quite well! There was no harm in him, poor fellow. Besides, he is dead!"

"Dead!" exclaimed Jenny. She felt as if a stone had rolled off her breast; but this sensation of relief, almost of elation, was only momentary. If 'M. Bernard' was dead, then someone else was tormenting her mother.

"Yes," said Mlle de Saint-Alde with the comfortable air of an old lady settling down to recite some tale of her youth, something half-forgotten, but something that she contrived to remember sentence by sentence as she dived into her memory. "I recall him quite well, of course. He was a young man, not a gentleman, I think, who attached himself to my father. At one of the inns where we stayed, I cannot remember which, he was very useful in the matter of passports and such formalities. He seemed to know Brittany very well, I suppose he was a Breton, I seem to recall a certain accent.

"Very likely, as your old German sea-dog said, he bought the tickets and made arrangements to go on the packet—that, of course, I cannot recall."

"But you do recall him, saw his face?" said Jenny thoughtfully. "You know, I've been considering this man for several days, almost weeks now, until his figure has all but taken concrete form."

"What was he like?" mused Mlle de Saint-Alde. "Well, now, you've asked me something difficult. A child hardly remembers features. I wasn't very much interested in him, you see. I think he was very dark—he wore a coat with several capes. He walked about a good deal. I went below in the cabin with your mother, and he was on deck, no doubt. What part he played in the death of poor Gilles and concealing it from your mother and all that, that's a bit of the tale I do not know."

"Why did he accompany you?" asked Jenny.

"Eh, that I couldn't tell, either. Maybe he was some sort of adventurer who knew my father was a man of great wealth and hoped to get a handsome fee for his trouble."

"Well, that might fit in, mightn't it," asked Jenny breathlessly, "with his coming forward again after many years and desperate adventures, and trying to get some money out of you and my mother?"

"He hasn't approached me," said Mlle de Saint-Alde, with a smile on her painted lips. "I have never heard of the fellow."

"Perhaps he would think Mother had more money?"

"Well, I'm not so badly off myself," boasted the old lady, with a deepening of her wide smile. "Thanks to your mother and my other kind friends, I enjoy a handsome pension and I have a great number of gifts. Yes, I have quite a little fortune tucked away, and it will all go to you and your cousins and your brother and sister, Jenny dear, when I am gone. And the way this cough's shaking me, that won't be so long."

"Oh, you mustn't leave anything to us, Aunt Beardie," protested Jenny impulsively. "You know we are quite well provided for, all of us."

"To whom else should I leave it?" asked the old woman with a sudden sombre note in her voice and a gloomy look. "You know my story—I'm quite alone. But come, we mustn't talk of myself. What more is it you want to know of this M. Bernard? How strange to say his name again after all these years! I don't believe I've given him a thought since the day I left Hamburg."

"You said he was dead. Welt of course, that puts an end to all interest I might have had in him."

"Yes, I remember that."

Aunt Beardie's glasses glittered in the shadow of the coach as she moved her head alertly with the air of one listening to a memory. "I remember my father's coming in one day when we were in Hamburg—we'd seen the young man once or twice, he used to visit us and have a glass of wine—I don't think my father liked him very much. I had the impression he was trying to get rid of him—perhaps the money question, that I couldn't say. Girls, my dear Jenny, as you perhaps know, aren't very much interested in such business matters."

"But you heard your father say he was dead?"

"Yes. One day he came in and said that this poor M. Bernard had got involved in a brawl at an inn and received a knife-wound and that he thought it was his duty to try to look after him, to stay at the hospital, and so on. But he died before they could get him out of the house."

"You're quite sure of that?"

"I'm as sure as I can be of anything that happened so many years ago. Why should I be mistaken? How persistent you are about this M. Bernard, Jenny!"

"I put that name on the advertisement, you see. It wouldn't have meant anything to anyone except that man, I suppose—the connection of the two names, Bernard and Geneviève, and the reference to the threats against my mother. And the fact that it was answered made me think that he was alive and had seen it."

"Did he sign the answer?" asked Aunt Beardie.

"No."

"Very well, then, I don't suppose it was even meant for you. It was just addressed Geneviève, or Mlle Geneviève?"

"Yes."

"And it referred to a chemist's shop in Versailles—M. Follope?"

"Yes."

"Why, I know that establishment well," said Aunt Beardie. "Everyone in Versailles knows M. Follope. The advertisement could not have been for you, Jenny. It was probably something in code or had to do with quite another affair."

"You know this chemist's shop?" asked Jenny keenly. She still, even against the evidence of her own senses, was not persuaded. Was it possible that Aunt Beardie, in order to save her anxiety, trouble, and possibly danger, was lying? If it was so, the old lady was playing her part with great skill. All she said had the ring of truth. Both her voice and expression showed a real concern and interest in Jenny's tale.

Now, seeing the girl hesitant and doubtful, she leaned forward, and tapping Jenny's smooth small hand with her own rheumatic fingers in the thick mittens, said:

"Don't concern yourself about these things, my dear girl, don't spoil your own youth with these ugly dreams and surmises. M. Bernard was never likely to be any trouble to anyone. He was a rather conceited foolish young man and he is dead long since. You should never have put that advertisement into the Gazette."

"I suppose not," said Jenny, with a sigh. Her feeling of relief had vanished, and she was not reassured by Aunt Beardie's tale.

She saw, however, that it was of no use to argue the matter any further with the puzzling old woman who either did not wish to, or could not, give her any information on the subject of M. Bernard. She said, however, with a half-laugh:

"Nevertheless, Aunt Beardie, when we reach Versailles, I intend to investigate the chemist's shop of M. Follope."

"You will be very well advised to do so," smiled the old lady, who seemed pleased that the conversation had taken a lighter turn, "for he makes the most admirable complexion washes and pomades. I get all my own cosmetics there, and though you may not think my face very attractive, believe me, I should look a grew deal worse without them. He also prepares a most delicious linden tea: I never travel without it. We must taste it tonight. And eau de Rouen, for the face, but that is dangerous stuff."

Aunt Beardie did not forget this promise, and when they were, after a good deal of fussing and complaining on the old lady's part, established in the best rooms in the best inn of Rheims and had been served with an admirable supper by a host who appeared much impressed by the good-humoured railleries of Mlle de Saint-Alde, the old lady produced a lacquer case from one of her valises and took out of this a muslin bag that contained, she said, M. Follope's linden tea or tisane. She had also a small spirit-kettle and a small tea service of pale-blue china painted with white birds.

Having been made thoroughly comfortable and eaten a good meal, she was in an amiable mood and insisted that Germaine—who indeed had done her best to make herself useful to the old lady—should join the little ceremony—for such it proved to be.

Jenny, though rather tired after her journey and anxious and disturbed from many distracting thoughts, could not refuse to humour her old friend. She took her place on a small stool in front of the large wood fire—Aunt Beardie said that it would take a very powerful fire indeed to air the room, damp from the days of fog. Jenny had changed her travelling-gown for the first dress that had come to her hand when the maid had unlocked her valise. It was light grey with a falling lace collar, and over it she had hastily placed a little shawl of peacock-blue silk with a deep fringe.

"You look very lovely, my dear," said Aunt Beardie, and again she leaned forward and patted the girl's small hands that were now rather tensely clasped

in her lap. "Your eyes, your hair, that dress, that shawl—how charming they look together! Now, Germaine, you know how to use the little spirit-kettle, and here is the linden tea, and here is the box of sugar."

Germaine respectfully set herself to the task, though secretly thinking that here was a great deal of fuss about nothing. She had been used to linden tea all her life, making it, drinking it, and administering it to others. She knew just how to infuse it; but she was quite willing to humour the old lady, whom she respected not only for her own obvious qualities of leadership and dignity, but because the faithful servant well knew the tale of how Mlle de Saint-Alde and her father had protected and succoured Vivienne de Vernon in those horrible days in Hamburg.

So Germaine, a round-faced, stout Breton woman, deftly made and infused the tea.

Mlle de Saint-Alde insisted that the servant should drink some herself, and into each of the three steaming cups of linden tea she placed a square lump of sugar out of the silver filigree box she had taken from her valise.

After the maid had drunk her share of the fragrant potion, she was dismissed to prepare the bedrooms for her two mistresses.

Mlle de Saint-Alde, settling herself comfortably in the great armchair that had been drawn up close to the fire, began to relate in a garrulous yet interesting manner some of her youthful experiences.

There seemed no part of the world she had not visited. She spoke at least snatches of several languages. She had been in Philadelphia and Boston.

"I was always able to earn a living by teaching French and music. Before my fingers became so crippled I was a very efficient performer on the harpsichord. An American gentleman by the name of Hargrave fell in love with me. I must read you his letters one of these days. How amusing when one is old to read the love-letters one received when one was young!"

Jenny hardly listened to these tales—the young seldom give much attention to the tales of the old—she was busy with her own problem, but now and then put in a polite word of ejaculation or smiled affectionately at Aunt Beardie.

But her own thoughts were far away—she felt drowsy with the heat of the great fire, the cup of warm tea, the glass of wine she had had at supper, the sheer weight and fatigue of her own thoughts; her slender body began to bend into slumber.

She leant her elbow on the arm of Aunt Beardie's chair and rested her brow in her hand; her hair fell in long locks across her face. What was Aunt Beardie saying?—it scarcely mattered. Those love-affairs, those adventures of so long ago—half-imagined, no doubt, exaggerated and garnished with the passing of the years; and Aunt Beardie's recital was often interrupted by coughing and searching for the pastilles that she seemed continually to lose.

At length she seemed to notice and to pity the girl's lassitude and inattention, and said kindly:

"Run along, Jenny, or you'll fall asleep where you sit. Remember we start again at about seven o'clock in the morning."

Jenny rose gratefully, kissed Mlle de Saint-Alde's hand, bade her good night, dropped her a little curtsy and hastened away to the room that had been provided for her—a strange room, one in which she had never slept before and was not likely ever to sleep again. Yet it became, though briefly, a refuge. She

was glad to blow out the candle, creep in between the cool, clean sheets and sink into sleep.

Jenny was violently awakened from these easily gained slumbers, for she was aroused by a beating on her door and a general commotion in the inn. It was some time, in the strange room and with her shaking fingers, before she could find the flint and tinder and light the candle by her side. She usually slept with a night-light or lamp. Her senses were confused, she felt that some disaster had overtaken her. She thought of her mother—was there ill news from Sherlock Hall? In her distress and confusion she never remembered that there could not possibly be ill news from home arriving in this place at this hour.

When she had got her light and thrown on her bedchamber gown and run out into the corridor, a frightened chambermaid soon told her that the cause of this trouble was the illness of Germaine, the Breton maid. Seized with violent pains and sickness in the middle of the night, she had been able only to pull violently the bell-rope in her room before she collapsed. The landlady and the chambermaids had found her groaning on the floor. The ostler had gone down to the street to bring the nearest chemist or surgeon. Meanwhile, the poor woman seemed, so far as the host of the inn could ascertain, at the point of death.

As much baffled and bewildered as distressed, Jenny went upstairs to the small room where Germaine had been lodged. Candles had already been lit and placed on the mantelshelf and the tables.

Aunt Beardie was in charge. She was fully dressed in her voluminous merino skirt of puce and lavender, her heavy black silk shawl was precisely arranged as if it had been daytime. Jenny noticed that even the large cameo brooch was in its place and that her hair was very smoothly brushed in the thick chenille net that she usually wore. How extra-ordinary that she could be so tidy in an instant, was the reflection that passed unconsciously through Jenny's mind.

Then her attention was given to the sick woman, and so far as the girl's inexperience could judge, poor Germaine was very ill indeed. She raised herself from the pillow only to vomit, and in between these spasms of sickness, her face became a deadly colour. The girl's alarm, however, received some comfort from the presence of mind of Aunt Beardie, who, with the air of a woman used to such scenes, reassured her by saying:

"It is nothing, my child. Don't concern yourself. It's merely a fit of indigestion. I have given her some of the pills I always carry with me and that never fail to relieve unpleasant symptoms. Why did they disturb you, they should have let you sleep!"

"Poor Germaine!" whispered Jenny. "I remember her all my life. That she should have fallen ill now, so far from the château de Vernon! My aunt and my uncle would be much troubled."

"They need never know of it, the illness will soon pass over. All she needs is a few days' rest, a warming-pan to her feet, and these pills that I shall leave behind with full instructions."'

"Leave behind, Mlle de Saint-Alde! But we can't possibly continue on our journey without Germaine!"

"We can't possibly wait here three or four days, my dear girl, while poor Germaine recovers from the results of some indiscretion in eating. Now, don't trouble your pretty head about this silly business. Go back to bed. I assure you that Germaine is in no danger."

Jenny, however, would not leave the servant's room until the little apothecary from the corner shop, hastily attired and divided between annoyance at being aroused in the middle of the night and the importance of being summoned to the grand lady's servant at the best hôtel in the quarter, arrived.

To Jenny's great relief he confirmed all that Mlle de Saint-Alde had said. The woman was suffering only from a sharp attack of indigestion. The medicines that the good lady had given her were perfectly correct—a few doses of these every hour or so and she would recover from her bouts of sickness and it would be only a question of time and rest.

On hearing this, Jenny went back to bed. But it was impossible to sleep, even though she kept the candles burning. There was nothing to be afraid of, yet she was afraid. There was nothing to wonder at, yet she wondered. What could have been more ordinary than this incident? But she wished that it had not happened.

She had an even deeper feeling of apprehension the next morning when mademoiselle took it upon herself on her own authority to decide that they should travel on alone without Germaine.

Jenny satisfied herself that the woman was recovering. She was propped up in bed and was able to speak, though feebly. With the servant's instinct of self-abnegation, she insisted that her young mistress should continue her journey and not think of her; a messenger would be sent to the château de Vernon and she had no doubt that M. le Marquis would be good enough to send one o the carriages to fetch her home. The poor woman, though still in a feeble condition, contrived to add that her young mistress should not attempt to wait on herself and Mlle de Saint-Alde, but that they should at the first opportunity hire another woman.

"Yes, yes," agreed Jenny, "we'll do that. But you mustn't think of us, only of yourself, Germaine. Lie quiet and get well."

To Mlle de Saint-Alde the girl expressed her doubts as to whether they should go on by themselves. She had practically given her aunt a promise that she would not go on without Germaine.

"But you have me to look after you," said the old lady indulgently. "Your aunt was merely thinking that you would be put to a good deal of trouble over your toilet and so on. Of course, when we get to Paris we must hire a competent maid. You will be staying at M. de Vernon's hôtel where there is always, I believe, a housekeeper in charge, so you will be in good hands, even if Madame de Vernon does not trust you altogether to my care—I suppose she thought I was very indifferent to appearances and even to niceties of conduct."

"Oh no," said Jenny, "of course it is not that—"

She felt that this excuse was rather lame, and she knew that this was precisely what Madame de Vernon had meant when she had insisted on the faithful servant's accompanying them.

However, this unpleasant incident had occurred and could not be altered. Jenny found that Mlle de Saint-Alde had taken all trouble off her hands; she had left a sum of money with the landlord of the inn and a note to be sent to Madame de Vernon.

"There is no need," she said, as they seated themselves in the travelling carriage, "to concern yourself about your maid. She will be very comfortable with those decent people and I dare say will enjoy herself a good deal more

there than she would have done with the fatigue of the journey. You know these country women are never happy in Paris."

"I suppose so," sighed Jenny, but with so serious a look that the old lady, with one of those half-laughs that always brought on a fit of coughing, said:

"How grave you are, my dear child! Does a smile never light up that pretty face? Suppose we talk of something agreeable? What about your betrothed husband—Sir Frank?"

"I hardly ever think of him," said Jenny, without reserve.

"Indeed! That is a curious state of affairs."

"Not curious at all, Aunt Beardie. You see, I don't think I'm going to marry him. It's a long story and rather an intimate one. It is not his fault, nor mine either, in a way. I was betrothed to him only because Mother seemed to wish it so much."

"That's not a very good reason," said Mlle de Saint-Alde contemptuously. "But then, I've rather strong ideas on the independence of women. I don't think you should get married unless you wish to. There is no need for you, for instance, wealthy and well placed, to take a husband for the sake of taking one. At your age too. Why does your mother want you to marry him?"

"That I cannot say," said Jenny, sinking back in her corner of the carriage with a sigh. "I always thought it was connected with this—this trouble I fear she's in. As if she wanted me to be away even from the shadow of it. Do you understand what I mean?"

"Well, I'm afraid I don't," replied Mlle de Saint-Alde. She yawned a little, as if slightly bored with the subject. Then she excused herself by saying: "I had such a disturbed night with that poor woman, I feel quite sleepy. As for what you say about your mother, I don't understand it and I don't believe it, because you'll never get me to credit that she is in any kind of difficulty or distress as you think."

"No," said Jenny regretfully, "I mustn't keep talking about it. It's becoming an obsession. But that is a feeling I had. You want me to speak freely to you, don't you?—you are so much older and you have so much experience. I tried to convey to you that I had the sense that my mother wanted to protect me from something that oppressed her by sending me far away with someone who cared about me and could be relied on."

"Well, I don't suppose you were very much interested in his reliability if you weren't in love with him, eh? You've never been in love, have you, Jenny?"

"No." The girl rather resented the brusque question; it was a subject she felt could not be discussed.

"Well, some day you will be, I suppose, if you don't let this affair of your mother's get too much on your mind. Why, you want to live your own life, Jenny Sherlock, not your mother's over again."

The girl was startled by this use of her surname, by a note that she had never heard before in Aunt Beardie's voice. But all this, she persuaded herself, was fancy. It was merely fantastic to suppose that there had been a change in the old woman, who seemed more vigorous, more alert, while even behind the dark glasses her eyes were flashing more brilliantly. Absurd, of course.

Jenny said conventionally:

"Will you stay in the Hôtel de Vernon when we come to Paris, Mlle de Saint-Alde?"

The old lady shook her head.

"I think I shall have done my duty if I escort you safely to the doors. There are servants there and your friends will be about you. I shall go to my rooms in Versailles."

"And I," smiled Jenny, "shall visit you there and investigate the shop of M. Follope, the chemist."

Aunt Beardie smiled without replying, as if she acknowledged, without greatly admiring, the jest. And presently she fell asleep, comfortably ensconced in her corner.

Jenny watched her while she slept. Her repose was full of dignity, she neither snored nor let her mouth fall open, her hands remained precisely folded on her lap.

What a strange, grotesque figure she was when viewed thus objectively, how odd indeed it seemed to think that she had had lovers and even now possessed, she said, a stack of love-letters. Brilliant offers of marriage had been spoken of. Jenny shuddered, lightly as the young will, when forced to contemplate age.

'One day,' she thought, 'I shall look like that. Perhaps I shall be babbling garrulously about lovers and love-letters, affections that are over. Perhaps I shall be ridiculous and strange and insist on living alone in two rooms. I wonder what those two rooms are like. I wonder if she keeps her bedroom at Versailles locked as she kept her bedroom locked at the Dower House.'

Then the motion of the coach caused Jenny, too, to become drowsy, and she also slept.

Her dreams were disturbed and violent. She thought that she was travelling in a small narrow coach of almost coffin-like dimensions, and that opposite her sat a strange dark man in a coat with capes whom she knew to be M. Bernard. He was looking at her with keen, cruel eyes, smiling at her and challenging her to snatch his secret from him.

Fright choked her and she moved with a cry to find herself looking into the eyes of Aunt Beardie, who had taken off her spectacles and was regarding her with an unblinking stare.

"My dear child," said the old lady, "you gave a fearful cry. You must suffer from nightmares. I shall prescribe you one of my famous pills."

The journey proceeded without further incident and they reached Paris late on a wet October day.

The girl's spirits, agitated and low, were not improved by the sight of the city, the mud-coloured houses, the large dark buildings, the narrow, crowded streets against the low fleeting clouds of an autumn twilight.

It was pleasant to arrive at the Hôtel de Vernon and be received by the kind house-keeper, Madame de Maillot, who had been apprised of her arrival and who had everything prepared for her in a cosy and homely fashion.

A room had been arranged also for Mlle de Saint-Alde, and though she had declared in her independent manner that she intended to go at once to Versailles however late the hour and however wet the night, she did agree, after some dispute, to accept Jenny's hospitality.

The next day she promised to take Jenny to Versailles so that she might satisfy her foolish curiosity by visiting M. Follope and incidentally obtain a supply of some good cosmetics and visit Aunt Beardie's rooms and see some of the treasures that she had accumulated during the early days of her many adventures.

Part V

The Chemist's Shop

Despite all Mlle De Saint-Alde had told of the history of M. Bernard, by now almost a mythical person in her mind, Jenny felt excited at the thought of the visit to the chemist's shop.

She was all the more disappointed when the next morning Mlle de Saint-Alde sent a message by the maid to say that she had a feverish chill and was not able to leave her bed that day. Jenny's disappointment was, however, soon allayed for the old lady sent her a note in which she, as her temporary guardian, gave her permission to go to Versailles by herself if she wished. It was a short and agreeable journey and she could not possibly come to any harm if she returned to Paris by nightfall.

Aunt Beardie had given Jenny full directions how to find M. Follope's shop, and the girl was touched by the old woman's thoughtfulness. How good of her to have written out these precise instructions when she was feeling ill, even feverish!

Jenny put the neatly written paper into her bag and provided herself with a good sum of money. She was always well supplied; her father did not stint her, and she was not extravagant. She realized now as she had never realized before the value of money. How impossible this adventure would have been without a penny in her purse! Now she had a sense of power as she put the louis d'or into the puce-coloured silk purse, then into her gold silk knitted bag.

And she did not tell the housekeeper, nor any of the servants, even the woman who had been given her as her personal maid, where she was going. She pretended that she was on an expedition to the shops. These good people believed, no doubt, that she was going to marry quite soon, perhaps next month. As Mlle de Saint-Alde was ill, they really thought nothing of it that the young lady should go by herself, though they were a little surprised that she did not order out the carriage.

"I shall go on foot," she said, "and, if need be, hire a fiacre."

So at length Jenny escaped from the house, from all supervision or question. She had put on her simplest dress and shawl, but the design was gay, the materials rich, and she still looked a well-dressed young gentlewoman.

The day was wet, a pearl-coloured rain was falling over Paris, the first dead leaves, amber and flame-coloured, were stuck to the moisture on the pavements.

Jenny had been to Versailles before, but only as a child to visit some relatives of her mother. The Court never went to the ill-omened, vast palace now, and Versailles was mostly inhabited by decayed gentlefolk, people who remembered the old days, and still in their floured wigs and knee-breeches or lace head-dresses and stiff skirts haunted the empty scenes they remembered glittering with brilliant grandeur.

What Jenny could recall of the tales that had grown up round the grandiose palace and park was not agreeable. She did not know why—perhaps because half-unconsciously she had absorbed the whispered tales of her elders—she associated the place with scenes of terror, of frightened, alarm, of doomed

people fleeing desperately down the straight avenue that led to the capital. She had been there on a hot day in summer; she remembered the large parade-ground gay with flags and booths where gingerbread and coloured paper caps with little tinsel stars were sold. Jenny came to a standstill on the wet Paris pavements, trying to get the recollections out of her mind. They had nothing to do with her present business.

She hailed a fiacre that was going slowly along, the driver in his waterproof cape and shiny top-hat looking about for fares. What Jenny was doing was so unusual that she expected the man to be surprised or even shocked. But it was a relief when he took her directions quietly; perhaps after all it was not such an unusual thing for young ladies to go about Paris alone.

Jenny had instinctively chosen a carriage that was neat and a horse that was well fed and stout, yet the equipage was surprisingly shabby compared with those to which she had been used, and the horse proceeded much more slowly than the pairs of well-bred animals by which she had been drawn. All this added to the strangeness of her adventure.

The journey, too, took much longer than she expected. That straight avenue seemed unending, the rain hung in heavy drops—she watched them run one into the other—on the coarse glass of the window, a wind swept the trees that lined the road, the yellow leaves fell in handfuls as if torn from the boughs by a wilful hand that petulantly cast them down. The sky was covered with quick-moving clouds, one in front of another, endless veils of vapour obscured the heavens. There were few people abroad on this forlorn autumnal day. The last bright flowers of the season hung in ragged, weather-beaten blooms from the vases and pots on the balconies of the flat-fronted houses she passed.

When she reached Versailles, Jenny felt her excitement had faded to a sick languor. The whole adventure seemed so unreal, so futile. Of course Aunt Beardie had been right. Jenny had listened to a lot of nonsense, she had been betrayed by delusions, almost by hallucinations. She was prepared now to credit her mother's tale of the man who had knelt beside her at the church of Saint-Roch, and to believe that she had never seen that second figure in the plantation near Sherlock Manor House.

Aunt Beardie had given her the name of the most respectable hôtel, as the old lady had written, in the town. The Saint-Denis, near the corner of one of the streets leading into the vast place that Jenny remembered seeing used as a fair ground ten years or more before; then she alighted and, as Aunt Beardie in her careful paper of instructions had directed her, paid the man for the journey in the carriage, gave him a fee for his food, and told him that she was going to visit some friends, and to return in a couple of hours or so.

Jenny stood before the chemist's shop, staring through the glass at majolica pots, vases, and bundles of dried roots, cinnamon, ginger, and other herbs that she did not know the names of tied together in bundles with thin blue and scarlet ribbons.

There was no one in the shop, which was full of shadows. Jenny put out her hand to press down the latch, then with the instinctive caution of a young, well-bred and carefully protected woman, she paused and looked up and down the street.

There was no one in sight save a boy in a blue blouse and a cap with a long tassel, who was bowling a hoop at the far end of the street; the sight of this child intent on his play gave Jenny courage.

Courage! Why should she need any? Tact was more required. How was she to open the subject of her inquiry? It would be easy to make purchases and to engage the man, M. Follope or his assistant, whoever it might be, in talk, but how was she to bring the matter round to her insertion in the Gazette, to M. Bernard?

Jenny had often faced this problem, but it had been impossible for her to solve it; she had left it to the inspiration of the moment. She had brought with her the copies of the Gazette in which were the two insertions; she was not trained in subterfuge and had no knowledge of detective work; she would have to rely on frankness. She would ask the owner of the shop what the use of his name in the advertisement meant and if he could give her any clue to the meaning of the phrase: 'At M. Follope's shop in Versailles you will be able to satisfy your curiosity.'

Her hand went out again and this time she pressed the latch and entered the chemist's shop.

A piquant odour greeted her, the dusty perfume of dried poppy heads, of camphor, lavender and cinnamon mingled in the enclosed air.

Jenny, to her intense annoyance and self-contempt, felt her heart beating quickly, her knees weak beneath her. She had never attempted anything like this before; physically brave she was socially timid, afraid of a rebuff, a possible insult, of making herself ridiculous or appearing impertinent. She hoped that M. Follope would be courteous.

A bell had tinkled above her head then she had opened the door. She steadied herself by the counter and looked round quickly at the inner door that led to the chemist's parlour. He would enter from there, of course. She hoped for a middle-aged or elderly man, paternal and understanding.

But it was a young boy with a weak, foolish face who entered, and Jenny's agitation increased. She was disappointed also. It seemed to her that she was likely to lose her time with this youth, who asked her in dull conventional tones if he could serve her.

Jenny, to gain time, asked for cosmetics of which Aunt Beardie had given her a list. And the boy brought them and put them without any word of recommendation on to the counter—milk-white bottles of lotion, small flat flasks, cases of rouge and powder, a long transparent bottle of green liquid, like seawater, with a red porcelain stopper and in the centre a drop of precious perfume moving up and down in its prison as the bottle was lifted.

As Jenny asked the price of these, her mind was working quickly all the while on her errand. The boy told her, and she took out her bag and counted the money out on to the marble slab on which were pestle and mortar.

The boy was slowly making a package of her purchases and still Jenny had not spoken. Then, ashamed of her own cowardice, she said, suddenly and precisely:

"Is M. Follope himself in the house?"

The boy shook his head, but she, thought she saw a gleam of interest in the dull eyes as he asked unexpectedly:

"Mademoiselle has come to meet someone?"

"I don't know," said Jenny. "I wanted to see M. Follope himself. I thought perhaps he could help me." She took the copies of the Gazette from her reticule, laid them on the counter and unfolded them. A slight smile was turning up the corners of the boy's thick, stupid lips.

"Oh, then mademoiselle has an appointment? She does wish to meet somebody?"

"No, I have no appointment," replied Jenny. Then, ingenuously she asked: "Do people make appointments here?"

"Sometimes," said the young man, looking at her half-insolently from behind his sandy lashes. "M. Follope's clients find it occasionally convenient to meet in the upper rooms."

"I see," said Jenny. "Well, there was this notice in the paper. I put one in—it doesn't matter with what purpose—and I had this answer. Or I think I had. You see, my name is a very ordinary one and this might refer to someone else."

The boy took the paper slowly, and, as it seemed to Jenny, very stupidly read it out, speaking the words one by one.

"Could you tell me," said Jenny, speaking, she felt, at random—but how else could she speak, for she knew so little?—"if you think that advertisement is intended for my mistress?"

"Is she Mlle Sherlock?" he asked suddenly.

"Yes," said Jenny eagerly, leaning across the counter. "It is for her, then!"

"Oh, I don't know about that, mademoiselle; but a gentleman came in a little while ago and said that a Mlle Sherlock would come here. I thought it was you as soon as you came in. I'm surprised, mademoiselle, you didn't give this name before."

Jenny felt she was moving in some intrigue that she did not understand. But this did not much concern her, she was so relieved to be on the track of M. Berhard.

"Yes, I am Mlle Sherlock's maid. Did this gentleman leave any message?"

"A letter."

Jenny steadied herself as the young man gave her a letter to which was tied, with tape, a common door-key.

"I do not suppose that it is of much importance—I have friends to visit in the town. Will you make my purchases into a parcel for me? These things are presents for the other maids." She went on talking carefully, yet quickly. "I wanted some eau de Rouen, too."

The common iron key was heavy in her hand; tied to it by a cheap pink tape was a label with an address.

"We have no eau de Rouen, mademoiselle." The young man blinked at her insolently. "We could send the recipe and the ingredients. One has to be careful to use just the right quantities."

Jenny did not listen, she was wondering if her attempt to disguise herself had been futile, even stupid; she was not interested in the beauty lotion that she had mentioned at random.

"I don't want my mistress, Mlle Sherlock, to know that I used her name. You will understand that I can pay for discretion?"

Was the young man suspicious? He gave her a disagreeable smile; Jenny guessed that the chemist's shop was the focus of dangerous yet silly intrigues; she had heard some of her friends hint with mischievous laughter at such places, heard a word or two from Clarisse about them.

"Will mademoiselle buy a package of linden tea?" asked the assistant in a loud tone. "Our brand is excellent."

"No. I shall return for the parcel."

She left the shop clutching the key—how absurd that he should have mentioned tisane; that had made her recall that grotesque incident when they had drunk Aunt Beardie's linden tea at Rheims, and Germaine had been taken ill in the night—how ashamed the poor woman had been afterwards, and how bitterly sorry to have neglected her charge as she thought she had through the sudden sickness that had forced her to re-, turn to Vernon.

'Why do I think of that now? I must put everything out of my head but this one thing.'

On the label tied to the key were directions how to reach a house in the impasse Louis le Grand, and Jenny stood before a gloomy building surrounding three sides of a dingy courtyard, and entered by a broken gateway in a dilapidated wall.

Jenny passed through this without pausing; the twilight had closed in on her without her noticing it and it was almost dark in the enclosed courtyard. The light of a humble lamp showed in one of the lower windows—the concierge, no doubt; but she did not need to disturb him, she had the key.

She looked at the upper windows, all blank, dirty, curtainless, and with the key in her hand she paused and listened to the faint, distant sounds of a dog barking, the wheels of a carriage passing on a neighbouring street, the crack of the whip on the cobbles.

'Am I foolish to do this? Without anyone's even knowing where I am going?'

Jenny sighed deeply, turned the key in the lock and entered the gloomy old house that once had been a decent mansion, but that was now let out in cheap lodgings, though at the moment there was but one tenant in the building.

The directions on the key read 'second floor' and there Jenny found a door standing ajar, and entering this, stood peering and apprehensive, at the head of a dim passage that was lit only by the dirt-encrusted window at the far end.

To right and left were doors, both half open. Jenny pushed that on the right hand and gazed at a forlorn and ugly medley of objects just discernible in the light from the window that was partly draped by a rich soiled quilt of embroidered satin.

The place resembled an antique-dealer's shop that had been long neglected; some gilt picture frames, muslin dresses, rolls of fringe and saucepans were piled on a backless settee of Utrecht velvet worn to shreds and showing the horse hair; dirty linen, broken plates, plaster masks and tattered books filled the floor space, and amongst all this filthy rubbish were two magnificent clocks and a roll of splendid lace.

In the cold fading light this confusion looked like the wreckage from a wild, desperate life that had been a failure; in this collection, worm-eaten and repulsive, was the material for a dozen disguises. Jenny withdrew, closed the door and opened that on the other side of the passage; this gave on to a room filthy and wretchedly furnished, but not in quite such disorder, for the floor was clear, save for a couple of wooden chairs and a kitchen table littered with bottles, cups and dishes; a blanket was pinned across the window and a faint light only—a light that was cold and soiled—fell into the miserable apartment.

As Jenny's eyes became accustomed to the gloom she saw that there was another door leading to an inner room opposite her and that this was half open; she drew herself erect as she peered in. Then she observed him coming forward slowly, so that in his dark clothes he seemed to form himself from the shadows.

He was disguised by his clumsy coat with capes, and by the foulard tied over the lower part of his face, but Jenny had no doubt that this was the man whom she had seen in the church of Saint-Roth and in the plantation at Sherlock.

"Is your curiosity satisfied?" he asked, and his voice was agreeable, his accent refined.

Jenny's own tones sounded thin in her strained ears.

"I came to warn you. Do not dare to meddle with us—whoever you are."

"What agony of mind brought you here, so alert, so bold? Would you not like to pierce the gathering shadows and see me as I am?"

"I know you. A criminal. You are afraid of the light."

"And not I alone, mademoiselle. You want to put your pretty fingers, your dainty nose, into a cesspool?"

"I am here and here to defy you."

"Ah! Shall I tell you how your mother lived in Hamburg? Why she never speaks of those days?"

The fear behind her courage sprang up.

"I don't wish to know. Nothing would induce me to listen to you. You're lying..."

"Ah, I've struck you, have I? Well, listen to me, I've no time to waste either."

He rose, and though but a gloomy shadow in the shadows she sensed that he was dull, fatigued, and that he found this interview he had so carefully arranged, for which he must have waited so long, distasteful.

"No doubt you pity your mother and you pity yourself," he declared, in a ranting voice like an actor rehearsing a part. "There are others to think of too—a young man whose ambition was frustrated, whose hopes led him astray, who never achieved anything, who will end his life perhaps as a hunted criminal or a suicide..."

This gave Jenny new fortitude; after all, she was dealing with some poor—indeed, perhaps some insane—creature.

"What do you want?" she demanded. "I can offer you a great deal."

"Can you?" His voice, which came clearly from behind the deep fold of his coat collar, took on a harsh contemptuous tone. "How can you, a stupid girl, promise me anything?"

"There are those who would do much for me."

Jenny thought desperately of Frank as she spoke; she would sooner go to him than her father. Yes, she would marry Frank to get the money wherewith to buy this man's silence; but she knew, shrewd as she was, one should not bargain with a blackmailer. Imagination and a logical mind served her in place of experience.

"I am foolish to talk of what I will give you. I shall indeed give you nothing. If at the end of several months I have found that you have left my mother completely alone, that you are in no way alarming or threatening her, I might see that you get a handsome reward; but for the moment, monsieur, do not try my patience."

"Ah, you threaten me!"

"Yes. My uncle has powerful friends at the ear of the King—as I dare say you know. I have only to speak to him."

"But you would not like to do that," interrupted the stranger.

"But I might feel it my duty to do so. As I say, I have only to speak to him and you would stand in grave danger."

"What danger should I stand in, mademoiselle?"

"You know your own record. I expect it is a criminal one. Your insolence in daring to alarm my mother is in itself a crime. We have friends and relations behind us, and you might find yourself in prison."

"She would find her secret blown all over France—"

"My mother has no secret."

"You think so?"

The stranger turned suddenly and pulled off his hat. She saw now that he had thick dark hair touched with ashy-grey that might have been powder. He moved towards her and she drew back—not out of fear, but from an intense physical repulsion.

"So far you have done the talking, mam'selle: now I've something to say. I may or may not be the 'M. Bernard' of whom you have heard, but I am someone who knows what your mother's life was in Hamburg; she was a very foolish girl—indolent, passive and timid; yet all the while excessively proud of her birth. That was amusing! In the midst of rags and squalor and degradation, she never forgot that she was a de Vernon!"

"Do you think that this frightens me?" said Jenny, turning her lips back from her teeth and smiling "How easy it is for you to tell me any lies you like."

"How easy for me to prove it!" he retorted. "I said she was a stupid girl: she kept a. diary. To relieve her feelings she poured out her emotions, quite in the fashion of that period, by writing. When a relative came at last to claim her, she was in such a hurry to escape from her miserable surroundings, so eager to disguise the kind of life she had been living, that she left her diary behind and it is in my possession."

"You can never prove she wrote it, whatever is in it."

"She would not have the courage to deny it, Were I to make my knowledge public, your mother would confess everything and destroy herself—and your father, your brother, your sister, your uncle and his children would all be shamed and disgraced."

To Jenny it seemed as though a counsellor were whispering in her ear, 'Be quiet—let him speak—rave...he'll do nothing violent now... Everything must be planned very carefully...'

"Ah, you adopt a different manner, you are silent!" said the stranger on a gloating note. "That's why I asked you to come here, to warn you, to leave me alone. Never mind who I am, or what precisely I know. You may by now have guessed the nature of it. I think that you have a close affinity with your mother. Have you not noticed that she has always been different from other women? I suppose you can't take a piece of silver, pure and fine enough to fashion a vase to hold the Virgin's lilies in, and use it for a sewer-pipe and not find it tarnished!"

"What do you want?" asked Jenny, hunching her shoulders together. "What wrong did she ever do you that you should torture her so?"

"To answer that would be to tell you a long story, mam'selle, which I am not minded to do here and now. It was difficult for me to get this interview with you. I had to go about it in what one terms the romantic way; but it's been effective. Now listen! Your mother and I have an arrangement that suits us both. I warn you not to interfere with it. Don't pry into her affairs. Don't try to find out things...don't rely on either your virtue or your cunning or your money. I shall put through what I have undertaken."

"So shall I!" whispered Jenny, still hunched together against the door.

"You understand?" continued the stranger, now no more than a dark shape in the light and shadow of the room as he walked to and fro, now and then the whites of his eyes faintly showing in the pale gleams from the window.

"You understand? It is useless for your uncle, your brother or your father to try to protect you... Breathe one word of this matter—and you destroy your mother. Make any further investigation, annoy me or endeavour to alarm me and she is lost. I am telling you this coolly."

"And what," asked Jenny, pressing against the door, "is my punishment if I continue my investigation, if I defy you, if I say that your diary is a forgery and all your accusations lies?"

"What I should say I could prove. Do you think your mother would keep silent if she did not know that?"

"Yet she is brave, too," challenged Jenny, withdrawn into the shadow with her hand on the door-handle.

"But what I could reveal, no woman would have the courage to face. Why do you think, mam'selle, she has spent all her money on a home for what you English people so charmingly call 'lost women—fallen women'? Why do you think she was so long in marrying, and brooded on going into a convent?"

Jenny stood intent, biting her under-lip.

"Perhaps because," suggested the stranger quietly, "when she was in Hamburg she earned her living in the same way as those lost women earned theirs—walking the streets—waiting at corners—under arches, in cellars—offering herself to strangers every night? Now, mam'selle, I hope you will not torment and endanger your mother by trying to pry into our agreement."

Jenny did not cry out or move; in her mind one thought was beginning to stake shape as a seed germinating in the earth begins to form the flowers, the leaves, the fruit. She was fascinated by this thought, interested too, excited and even pleased. It was the perfect solution to what had been a few moments before an insoluble problem. She became quite absorbed in this idea, as in a new exciting project suddenly offered.

Nothing else seemed of any importance. Her natural feminine duplicity, sharpened by her need, made her answer smoothly: "I shall take your warning. I have been foolish. I see that I should only do my mother a further injury were I to try to protect her; I shall not even endeavour to find out who you are."

"You had better not!" he replied sullenly. "I shall know at once if you put detectives on me or tell any of your relatives. Look after yourself—forget what happened before you were born. There is a fine match offered you—take it. Do you understand now why your mother has always wanted to get you away from Sherlock, out of her life?"

"Yes—I understand."

"Leave off this play-acting, trying to pose as a heroine pretending that you have returned to her girlhood to lead her life... You're not the same kind of person as she was. She never had your wit, your dignity. You're not so beautiful, either, though you're attractive enough. I have some liking for you, some respect, therefore I have given you this warning. I shall not be able to contrive another such meeting. It's too dangerous."

"Yes," whispered Jenny, "yes, too dangerous."

"Your mother knows the price I have asked, and she is paying it. Leave her alone."

'If I had brought any weapon—even a broken weapon,' thought Jenny, 'it would have been now that I should have used it... Now I must play for time until another opportunity.

"You were bold, to come here," he continued. "You never thought, I suppose, what might have happened to you? You're like what she was in that—proud, fastidious, so sure of every man's chivalry and protection..."

"You sold her?" sighed Jenny under her breath. "You?"

"We'll say this M. Bernard sold her when there was nothing else to sell and they were living in a filthy cellar together, and there was no one to help them." He paused, and then added in a drier tone, as if he regretted having said so much, "This is my final advice. Try to interfere with me in any way—try to put anyone on my track—try to discover even who I am... You can't do much for all your boldness...you're an inexperienced girl—never even allowed out alone... It amazes me how you were ever able to get here today... If you do try to do anything I'll destroy your mother and you, and everyone who bears your mother's name or your father's name—completely."

"I may go now?" asked Jenny flatly; she opened her hand and let the heavy key fall on the floor.

"Yes, you may go."

Jenny crept out into the dark corridor, out of the front door, out into the dark air of the courtyard. Never before had she been in so vile a dwelling. 'I must not complain—I must not shrink,' she said to herself. 'I must remember what she went through, what she lived through. I must try to understand.'

She crossed the courtyard, passed over the damp flagstones, under the gateway and into the dark street where the murk was only dispelled by the straggling gleams of oil-lamps set on iron standards at rare intervals along the pavement.

Practical issues impinged upon her mind, numbed by horror. The coach would not have waited. How should she get back to Paris? There would be an uproar over her long absence. She strayed aimlessly about the streets a little, not knowing in what direction she went. She passed the shop of. M. Follope, and there were lights in the window, then came to the Saint-Denis. There she found the hired carriage was still waiting, for the man had been well paid, and made no great matter even for such a lengthy wait. If he had thought of her at all, he believed that she had been detained gossiping, or perhaps flirting. If she had been stared at, a young woman alone, out after dark, she had scarcely noticed it; she had begun to learn that her standards were not those of every girl: she belonged to a class peculiarly protected, fastidiously kept apart. Many young women of her age were earning their living and having to contrive, somehow or other, with what dignity and decorum they could muster, to move about town and country unescorted.

So Jenny returned in the hired carriage to Paris without remark or incident. She leaned back in a corner with her hands clasped, quite oblivious of where she was, one thought only in her mind. It was now clear to her by what means her mother must be rescued. Any attempt to bargain with this criminal who was threatening her was obviously useless, a mere gross humiliation.

Any effort to hand him over to the law would be, as he himself had so repeatedly remarked, pregnant with ghastly consequences, not only for Lady Sherlock, but for everyone connected with her. That her mother, should such a catastrophe occur, would at once destroy herself Jenny did not doubt.

She lay inert in the greasy interior of the hired carriage in which so many passengers, weary or elated, sadly fatigued or joyful with hope, had ridden on their various occasions... One picture chased another round her mind as if painted on a revolving ground. Sherlock Manor House and her mother moving there with an air of peace, but what false peace... Jenny had always felt uneasy before her mother's serenity. Now she knew why; that whole life, so delicious and delicate, had been a sham: Lady Sherlock had been playing a part during the whole of Jenny's lifetime and before... Jenny had always known that her mother's relations with her husband and her two younger children, with everyone but herself, had been clouded; she had been gracious and bright, but always remote; only with Jenny had she been really herself, but even from Jenny her tragedy had been hidden.

'I must try to understand whose daughter I am.'

When she arrived at length, and the journey seemed endless, like a voyage through Hell, she discovered great consternation at the Hôtel de Vernon. It had been discovered early in the day that Mlle Sherlock had not gone to her dressmaker or to any of the shops she said she had been visiting, and she now found herself, her brain on fire, her soul in a tumult, faced with the necessity of inventing a tale to account for her long absence. This she did to Madame Maillot with a glibness that surprised herself; she was beginning to be astonished at her own resources; she made up a tale of having gone to Versailles to some invalid woman who was a protegee of her mother's, and of having done this secretly and in a hired carriage, because she believed she would not be allowed to do' so, she said, if she avowed her intention beforehand. And even as she was speaking, another personality came into her mind, one whom she had completely forgotten, Aunt Beardie!

She must know something of this unutterable horror of the past. What part had she played? What was she playing now? She must be Lady Sherlock's adviser, and confidante—

Checking her own recital, the girl asked after Mlle de Saint-Alde. And here was another agitated tale poured from the lips of the housekeeper. Mlle de Saint-Alde must have left the house very early, soon after Mlle Jenny; ill as she was, she had evidently been suddenly agitated for the safety of the girl. She had not troubled to see any of the servants, but one of them had noticed her muffled up, leaving the house, walking feebly, leaning on her stick, yet with a hurried step in the direction of Saint-Roch. They had believed that the pious old lady had gone to offer up some prayers, but as she had not appeared for déjeuner, they had gone in search of her in the neighbouring shops, bazaars and churches. She had not been found; then a note had been discovered on her dressing-table informing M. de Vernon's servants that, ill as she was, she had decided that she must go in search of Mlle Sherlock, who was in her charge.

"Mademoiselle," the housekeeper said with tears in her eyes, "the poor lady has not yet returned."

'Of course,' thought Jenny; 'she guessed my errand; she believed I was in danger. But how is it she allowed me to go at all?'

If Madame Maillot still found Jenny's long absence disconcertingly strange, still more mysterious did she find the way, in which the girl accepted her aunt's absence. Far from ordering a hue-and-cry for the old lady, or showing any concern about her possible fate, Jenny murmured that no doubt Mlle de Saint-

Alde could look after herself. "She must have gone through many adventures in her time. She has a very peculiar disposition."

With no more than this, Jenny went up to her room. Madame Maillot, tiptoeing up behind her, heard the key turn in the lock. The good woman could not forbear suspecting some mystery and associating this with the eccentric old lady whom she had, from the first moment she had seen her, slightly disliked and definitely feared.

Jenny, locked in her room where the watch-light for the night had already been lit, sank down in the great chair at the foot of the bed, pulled off her bonnet and loosened her shawl, with mechanical movements.

She had not concerned herself about the absence of Aunt Beardie for two very good reasons. First, she believed that the adroit and bold old woman would be impossible to discover if she once wished to conceal herself, and secondly she suspected Mlle de Saint-Alde of knowing at least something of the great horror that was threatening Lady Sherlock which her daughter had that day discovered for the first time. Besides these two considerations, Jenny was so overwhelmed by what had happened to her that day that she scarcely cared anything about the motives or behaviour of Mlle de Saint-Alde; she was forced to consider these only as they were part of her problem.

'She must know,' thought the girl, opening her tightly buttoned bodice at the throat and putting her hand to her damp skin. 'She must know something—she and Mother must have consulted together. And what was her past? Did she escape what Mother had to endure? Why does not this wretch blackmail her? She has money enough—patrons, a pension, everything!'

Jenny's quick mind answered itself.

'Perhaps he does. Perhaps he gets a toll from both these unfortunate women,' she thought, trying to puzzle out the complicated terrors of the situation. 'But could Mlle de Saint-Alde be intimidated by anyone? Besides, she has not very much to lose. She has a reputation already for eccentricity; although she is received in the most exclusive and respectable circles, a few scandalous tales about her youth would probably not do her much harm. It was different in Lady Sherlock's case. Besides, there was the diary. It was not likely that both the girls had been weak enough, impulsive enough, to throw their terrors on to the pages of a book.

'Well,' said Jenny, rising at last and pacing up and down the room with no thought of repose, till her limbs ached with fatigue and her head was dull and dizzy, 'if mademoiselle can't help ale, it is clear that she's not been able to help Mother. I must act by myself.'

Without further light than the dim glow of the night-light, without changing the clothes she had worn all day, Jenny Sherlock, pacing up and down the room or flung into a large chair, or on her knees with her face hidden in the knotted quilt, made her plans for freeing and avenging her mother.

Mlle de Saint-Alde returned early in the morning to the Hôtel de Vernon. She was in a state of considerable agitation and had a confused tale to tell. She had been worried, she declared, beyond endurance at the disappearance of Jenny Sherlock whom she regarded as her charge. How should she answer to Madame de Vernon, let alone the girl's parents, if anything happened to her? She knew Paris, she declared to the terrified Madame Maillot: she was aware of what might happen to a young girl.

"I thought, mademoiselle, she had your permission..." the housekeeper began to stammer, but the formidable old lady pushed upstairs. It had been raining in the night and her clothes were damp, the ends of her shawl were wet. There was mud, too, on her flat-soled shoes, though she declared that, having been too exhausted to return to the Hôtel de Vernon she had spent the night with a friend at Passy.

The terrified Madame Maillot had a ghastly impression that the old lady had spent the night walking the boulevards of Paris, perhaps sitting in cafés or churches. Was this possible in the case of one so correct as Mlle de Saint-Alde? And why had she been so concerned about the girl? Why had Mlle Jenny gone off by herself?

Madame Maillot, into whose easy and placid life no difficulties had yet entered, was in a state of anxiety amounting to torture, debating whether or no she should send a messenger to the château de Vernon. In what way could she possibly control either of these ladies who both seemed so wilful and odd in their behaviour? And what possible clue had she to whatever it was—urgent and mysterious—that was directing their actions?

The housekeeper was considerably relieved when Mlle Jenny at last appeared at the breakfast-table in the salon her normal self. The girl had changed into a light woollen dress; her hair was smooth and banded, and her face, though pale, calm and resolute in expression. She exchanged the usual commonplaces with the housekeeper, and when that good woman told her about the belated return and strange behaviour of Mlle de Saint-Alde, Jenny replied, without much perturbation, "She is a very surprising old lady, you know, madame. I believe she has done a good number of crazy things at times. She was probably nodding in the pew of her favourite church, or drinking her favourite linden tea with her favourite friends. You really must not concern yourself about her. As for me," added the girl formally, "I am sorry if my little adventure caused you any distress," and smoothly slipping into an untruth, continued, "in London, you know, I go about as I like: English girls have a great deal of freedom."

Madame Maillot, considerably reassured, then told Jenny that Mlle de Saint-Alde appeared far from well.

"She has lost her voice—she has really a terrible cold."

"I am afraid," said Jenny, "she is rather a troublesome guest. You know my uncle feels that we all owe her a great deal, and should put up with her little whimsies. I shall go at once to see her."

When Jenny knocked at the door of Mlle de Saint-Alde's bedroom, a hoarse voice at once bade her come in.

She entered and was disagreeably impressed by the atmosphere of the room, something like that of a sick-chamber and something like that of a church. The curtains were shrouded across the window and the room was in a thick gloom. The old lady had been burning some pastilles and the air was heavy with the acrid odour of medicine. She had risen and was sitting with her breakfast-tray on her knees in front of the fire. The day was not really cold, but Jenny knew that old people had chilly blood, and she was not surprised to see Mlle de Saint-Alde leaning towards the flames, which were leaping in and out of the crackling billets of wood.

Aunt Beardie had two shawls over her shoulders, and with the paint on her face carelessly dabbed on looked a grotesque and pitiful sight. So still in her movements...but her dark eyes were energetic and full of fire.

"I'm sorry you're ill," said Jenny, moving towards the fire and looking at her with pity; she had changed since her vigil of last night: she felt herself to be far remote from everything but her purpose. The girl knew Aunt Beardie must have some knowledge of the secret to have taken that wild journey at night time; a great deal had happened to her own spirit and heart; she was no longer afraid of the old woman or even very sorry for her, nor was she much concerned with what she knew.

'I must,' she thought, 'beware of pity, of all emotions, and think only of what I have to do.'

"I suppose," she said precisely, "it is not of much use talking to you. I believe you will not tell me what you know. I have found out a great deal more about that matter of which I spoke to you."

"About your poor mother?" asked Aunt Beardie, and then broke off to cough into a large handkerchief embroidered with lace, and to sip some orange flower water noisily.

"I don't think, mademoiselle," said Jenny formally, "that when you said there was nothing that could possibly trouble my mother, you spoke the truth. Impossible that you could have lived with her in Hamburg and not have known...Don't you think that I know as well as you do?"

"It all happened before you were born," said the old woman, with what sounded like impatient malice. "Come, who are you to set yourself up to know better than I do what is past? My life, wasn't it, and your mother's—not yours?"

"All that merely gets us away from what I was asking you. I have no time to waste—nor strength. I shall not speak to you of this again: what I have got to do I can do alone. You could help me, but I don't think you will."

"I don't know anything," said the old lady suddenly. "Here, take this tray, child."

Jenny approached her and took the tray, set it on the table inlaid with mother-of-pearl by the window.

"You mean—you won't speak?" said Jenny sorrowfully. "I can understand that. It was all so very long ago and ought to have been forgotten, but what's the use of your silence if somebody else knows?"

"There can't be anyone else who knows anything about Vivienne," broke in Aunt Beardie, with great exasperation.

"Supposing that man"—she could not bring herself to utter the name—"the young man who helped you—you saw afterwards that he was dying... Supposing that he was not dead?"

"I am not supposing anything of the kind! I know he did die at the Hamburg hospital."

Jenny thought in despair, 'She has all the obstinacy of the old—I suppose her wits are giving way...perhaps out of loyalty she has persuaded herself that it has never happened, so she has put it out of her mind.'

But the girl made one last attempt: she moved impulsively across the room, and, standing by the old woman's hooded chair, said, "Mlle de Saint-Alde, you might be able to help me. I believe—I have reason to think—that this man is alive and that he is threatening my mother. He even has papers that might give him some hold over her."

"You've got magots in your head!" cried Aunt Beardie with a groan. "I've got a cold—on my chest again. I was out looking for you yesterday."

"Why did you do that?" asked Jenny, frowning. "You knew where I was going—you said that I might go to Versailles and visit M. Follope's shop. Why don't you ask me what I found there? Why aren't you interested, Mlle de Saint-Alde?"

"Because I know it's all a pack of nonsense—dependent on a young girl's moods and whims. I gave you permission just to keep you quiet, and then afterwards I was sorry. I remembered the kind of existence you'd led—protected, pampered. I thought, 'She's only a young fool. I must remember she hasn't led the life I have.' Then I went out after you, hired a fiacre and started to go to Versailles; but I was taken ill on the way and I had to come back, and I drove out to Passy to ask advice from a friend there."

"Do you tell me," interrupted Jenny, "that after all you can't remember anything of what happened in Hamburg?"

"Yes," declared the old lady violently, "I remember nothing. You would do well not to mention that cursed place ever again, either to your mother or to me." Then, after a short pause, during which Jenny stood silent with remote face, the old lady said in a gentler tone: "When are you coming back to England? You've done no good in Paris of in Brittany either. Your mother will be wondering why you stay away so long, your father too. Besides, there is the question of your marriage."

"Marriage! There will be no marriage for me."

"That's as it may be!" retorted the old lady sharply. "When are we going back to England?"

"Are you coming with me, Aunt Beardie? You're so restless, always moving from place to place."

"I shall soon find the end of my travels," replied the grim old woman "I've moved about too much in my life to stay long in one place."

"I am not returning to London yet," said Jenny. "I've got something to do here. You must do as you please. Mother would always welcome you at the Dower House."

The darkened bedchamber was lit by the leaping flames of the fire and gleams of bright sunshine fell between and under the heavy curtains.

Jenny had ceased to take much interest in Aunt Beardie, in anyone really. She was dedicated to a purpose, so firmly set that it had become part of her existence. The familiar, harsh voice broken by coughs, disturbed her with the question:

"Did you purchase those cosmetics at M. Follope's shop?"

"Yes, but I forgot to bring them with me. I left the parcels on the counter."

"Ah, you are not used to carrying your own purchases! It would surprise you to learn the rough life some women, well born, carefully bred women, have had."

This was Aunt Beardie's usual style when she began to grumble about her past misfortunes, but now the words had a special meaning for Jenny; her mother's life in Hamburg—did she dare to imagine what that had been?

Her curiosity pricked her with a sting of agony; she believed now that she had known the truth when she had lived in her mother's room at Vernon, handled her clothes, gazed at the plan for the Fulham Home.

The dark corners, the cellars, the cheap lodgings, the dingy pretences, the hot coins, the greasy paper-money passed from palm to palm; the young girl becoming passive, stupid in the grasp of her master until she was part of the

vileness about her but all the while a sulky, cold, remote pride of birth, and those moments of acute agony when the entries in the diary had been penned. Tan I understand?' mused Jenny; she had never formed in her mind, much less taken on her lips, the name given to what her mother had been.

"What are you thinking of?" Aunt Beardie's voice broke in on Jenny's dreadful musings; she replied at random.

"Of the eau de Rouen—I did not buy any, after all."

"You should send for the recipe. M. Follope supplies the ingredients. But one of them is dangerous."

"Dangerous?"

"Poison. One must be careful. You silly girls sometimes have enough poison in your beauty recipes to kill a man."

"To kill a man," repeated Jenny with a pleasantly set smile; she felt such a sudden joy that she turned her head away lest Aunt Beardie should see her face.

"Yes," continued the old woman with her usual amusing malice. "I suppose you have never thought of that? About Vivienne, your mother, I mean? If she had been in such misery in Hamburg as you seem to think, and been as proud as you seem to think, she could easily, with some beauty wash, have destroyed herself. Eau de Rouen is not the only complexion lotion with arsenic for the base."

'Arsenic,' repeated Jenny in her mind; she thought, 'Aunt Beardie does know something and this is her way of telling me she despises mother for living.' But what did that matter now? Everything was simple, her weapon had been put into her hand.

She glanced at her companion, who had suddenly fallen asleep.

After all, what hope could Jenny have of any help from this aged, broken woman who had outlived her day and all her friends, outlived almost her own story, who had now become difficult, obstinate and hard to rule?

The poor old creature had said herself that soon her wanderings would come to an end and she would be sleeping in the grave. Perhaps it was as well she had closed her lips for ever on the story of what had happened to them in Hamburg.

Jenny had risen softly, and, going to the bureau, took pencil and paper and wrote:

> *I have another proposition to make to you, do not refuse to listen to it. You will find it considerably to your advantage. This is no catch-phrase, but is written in all sincerity. Will you meet me at the little café opposite the shop kept by the old German sea captain? Tomorrow about six o'clock?*

Jenny signed the letter 'Geneviève'—the name was so common it could not possibly betray her. She wrote in a careful round hand, and remembered the days when she would sit hours over her copybooks. She addressed the letter to M. Bernard, c/o M. Follope, Versailles.

That done, she went to Aunt Beardie, roused her and reminded the old lady she had forgotten to bring the packet of cosmetics from the chemist in Versailles. Perhaps it would be a good opportunity for both of them to go for them and not only to bring the parcel but to visit Aunt Beardie's apartments as well.

Jenny thought this would be a good way of passing the anxious time until she should get an answer to her letter; and that it would be a fair excuse to see from the outside the house he was living in and to gain if possible some information as to who lived there; she could think of no other excuse for going to Versailles; it was a curious coincidence that Aunt Beardie should have a chamber in that town.

But the old lady absolutely refused to move and declared that her health was a good excuse for her inaction. Huddled over the fire with a glass of linden tea in her hand, she was morose and sleepy. Jenny had no other excuse for going to Versailles, so she wrote a letter to M. Follope begging that he would forward to the Hôtel de Vernon the parcel she had bought, paid for and left there—she had stayed till too late an hour with her friends to be able to call again; she also asked for the materials for making eau de Rouen and enclosed the money for these.

The next day the parcel arrived at the Hôtel de Vernon, but there was no answer to the letter she had sent to M. Bernard, nor did one come during the following week. Jenny was in a state of suspense amounting to agony, feeling she had for ever lost touch with this man who was now the only person in the world besides her mother in whom she had an active interest.

He would of course be far too clever to meet her again. He would not be drawn by her poor bait; he would know well enough that she could offer nothing, considering the hold be had over Lady Sherlock; besides, she believed that he was cruel and enjoyed cruelty for its own sake. He was satisfying many morbid and frustrated passions in his persecutions of a woman so, beautiful and high above him socially, over whom he had once been master. Jenny was quick to realize such a man as this must delight in dragging down the bright, the lovely, the secure, and would loathe to see one whom he had once degraded escape from him.

'Now I have lost him,' said Jenny, 'I must think of something else.' What? She felt cornered, desperate and dull of mind from the strain of her useless waiting; she constantly fondled the key of her desk wherein lay the recipe and the ingredients for the eau de Rouen.

Aunt Beardie, who had recovered her health a little, and who now seemed a little less hoarse and less tormented by the neuralgia in her face, became impatient of the girl's obstinate refusal to return to England, and three days after the Versailles adventure she took herself off, travelling in her usual fashion without maid or companion, declaring that she was going to the Dower House at Sherlock, where she intended to make herself comfortable for the winter.

The only notice that Jenny took of her—for it really mattered little to her where this independent old woman went—was to beg her not to alarm Lady Sherlock on her account. "You can at least do this for me, Aunt Beardie. You can say that I am happy in Paris with my friends, buying clothes and going to the opera—you know the season is just beginning. You can say anything you like as long as you do not alarm my mother."

"You may be sure I shall not do that," said Aunt Beardie. "Alarm Lady Sherlock! All I want is peace and quiet, and I shall never let anyone know what a foolish girl you are."

Nearly a week after the departure of Aunt Beardie, Jenny received a letter from Versailles. Two lines merely, fixing the appointment at the little café, Le

Gros Chêne, opposite the German's shop, making the tryst for that evening at six o'clock at the latest.

"Then I suppose I shall see his face."

Yet she knew, even while the thought shaped itself in her mind, that her enemy would take special pains not to give her any sign by which she might recognize him. She had tormented herself, amongst many desperate conjectures, with this futile and unimportant one whether he was really malformed or wounded in the face, or whether the scarf which he tied round the lower portion of his features was not merely an obvious and theatrical disguise.

She contrived to dismiss this from the whirl of her fiercely agitated thoughts and to try to put herself into the position of the blackmailer. What could such a creature want? Money and power?

I must endeavour to place myself inside his cruel, perhaps insane, mind. What does he think that I am going to offer him? Nothing that he could value—money? Yes—perhaps.'

Jenny would not blame her mother even in her secret mind; it was other people she blamed for what she was forced to do, people dead long ago, she supposed—or old and far away; she sat with her pale hands folded in the pale satin of her lap.

A more horrible reflection twisted her to a deeper rage and a more forlorn sense of fear. This she could not put into words, she would not at any price have voiced or written it; if she had done so it would have run like this—'He desired my mother, perhaps he desires me. Has he thought out some price like that?' What did it matter what price the blackmailer was likely to demand?—he knew how to obtain it.

As all the forces of her being were concentrated on this interview in the little café opposite the German's shop, she hardly noticed the letters that came with the morning's mail from England.

There was one from Frank Quarry. She broke the seal listlessly. His words were but so many traceries of ink on the paper, jumbled together incoherently. These protestations of love and devotion, what did they mean to her now?—nothing indeed. The letter fell from her fingers. If he had offered her a definite service, if he had said, 'I am yours—do with me what you will,' she might have put such declarations to the test; but there was nothing of that.

Jenny was well aware that what she was about to undertake on her own initiative was something of which Frank Quarry would disapprove with a force as great as the force that she was putting into what she was doing. His note held little interest for her, nor did that from her mother, for Lady Sherlock wrote formally. There were little nostalgic details of the children, the tutor, the governess, even of the dogs and the swans. 'Afterwards,' thought Jenny, 'afterwards I shall have time to read and answer it.'

Not until she was dressed and out of the house, all her preparations made, did she recall that Lady Sherlock had not mentioned Aunt Beardie.

'I suppose she has become so much part of her life that she no longer thinks of her. I suppose the old lady has settled down at the Dower House and is giving no one any trouble.'

But there again Jenny wondered. Did Lady Sherlock not mention Mlle de Saint-Alde's return to England because that forward and melancholy woman knew too much? Were there moments—before the lamps were brought in—

when, wandering in the last sunlight at the end of the garden at Dower House, the two women talked together in terrified tones of the life they had spent together in Hamburg?

Jenny pulled her veil down over her face as she hurried to the Place Vendôme. Now that Aunt Beardie had returned to England there was no one to control her movements. Madame Maillot had looked at her with anxious apprehension, it was true, and seemed to wish to restrain her liberty, but she had no authority to do so; Jenny had managed to fend off all the housekeeper's respectful and tedious inquiries; the girl had many friends in Paris. It was not difficult to persuade the worthy housekeeper that she was visiting first one and then another.

And on the two occasions when Madame Maillot had thought it her duty to follow her master's niece, the girl's errands had been harmless indeed, for Jenny had gone no farther than the church of Saint-Roth, where she had seen her mother kneeling beside the stranger, and there bowed down on a rush-bottomed chair, or even on the stone steps in front of the side altar where she had seen those two kneeling stiffly side by side. Jenny had tried to pray, to clear her mind for what she meant to do and the intention that lay behind her resolve.

Now there was no more time for talk all must be action. The wind was keen and stirred the dead leaves underfoot—the first dead leaves, Jenny noted; this triviality intruded upon her tense nerves. On the pavement torn shreds of paper, straw and the dismal rubbish of the gutter were blown about her feet. She had put on the darkest clothes she could find—her wardrobe had not many humble garments, but this at least was of a deep prune colour that melted into the twilight, and a veil which she had drawn down over her bonnet and across her face was of thin black lace. Her hands, deeply gloved in doeskin, were clenched in a muff of black fur in which she held, tightly grasped, a long knitted violet silk purse with a golden ring.

The lamps in the arcade were beginning to be lit—their coarse yellow light fell across her hurrying figure. She noticed nobody and felt that she was alone amongst the passers-by who seemed to be absorbed, as she was herself, in sad, gay, or placid errands or in the mere listlessness of indifference; they were to her but part of the shadows.

When she reached the German's shop she paused and stood there, her back against the shutter. The light behind her fell full on her figure, picking her out in a dark pool of shade, but it mattered little to her if she was seen or by whom she was seen.

She looked through the thin net of her veil at the little café. She wondered why she had suggested this rendezvous. Ignorant as she was of such places, she could have thought of another resort, even from seeing the names of cafés on their doors as she went abroad in her carriage. She had chosen this at random, and it was no more than a sordid wineshop, she thought, frequented by artisans of the poorer sort and workmen who had a few sous in their pockets. Her appearance, quietly as she was dressed, would surely be very conspicuous there. Was it one of the places of whose existence she was beginning to be aware—silent and secret—like M. Follope's shop in Versailles, where women, even well dressed, could come and go unchallenged?

She crossed the pavement. A gust of wind caught her dress, a storm was blowing up; she felt the first drops of rain penetrate her veil and touch her skin

as she went into the café. The place was not what she expected: it resembled a shop; there was a long wooden counter down the centre of the bare room at which sat a man in a worn fur cap and a faded green cloth jacket, peering through a pair of silver-rimmed spectacles at the evening paper. A small bell rested on the counter close to his hand. Jenny paused, so absorbed in her purpose that she was neither embarrassed nor afraid.

"I have an appointment here with a friend. I have never been here before—can you direct me? Where are the tables? Where does one have supper?"

The man, without insolence or respect, without either rising or removing his cap, pointed gravely towards an inner door. 'He'—she used the pronoun for she would not soil her mind by using the man's name—'has been here before me and prepared the way.'

She stepped with unconscious daintiness over the rough floor, opened the inner door and entered. The place was melancholy. A few tables were set about. The lamp fastened to the wall gave an ill light. Pictures, some political, some theatrical, were nailed and pasted carelessly to the wall. Some fly-blown newspapers attached to a rod hung on a hook. In one corner of the room a man in a workman's blouse was drinking a modest glass of cheap red wine. At another table near him a young man in plaid trousers and wearing a tasselled cap was scribbling on a pad of paper.

Jenny took her seat, pressed her hands close together on the purse she held inside her muff. She thought coolly, as if she were dealing with the problem of another person, 'How shall I know him? Yet I believe I should know him anywhere. He will have another disguise. He would be tall, heavy and dark. His voice is melodious and beautiful.' She was punctual to her tryst. She did not care if she had to wait. She was prepared to endure anything from this man, even insolence, for she knew that this was part of all the wickedness, his—and hers; she did feel a dreary pang at the thought that he might not appear at all.

The waiter came to take her order. She was cool even at that unaccustomed moment. "I am expecting a friend. I shall wait. Bring me a glass of coffee." He showed no more surprise or respect than the fellow in the fur cap sitting behind the counter.

'I suppose that he knows this place or has made himself known here,' mused Jenny. The coffee was strong and her fastidious mind noted mechanically the coarse glass, the muddy colour of the steaming liquid, the cracked thick saucer on which it stood.

'We must have wine. I must persuade him to drink with me.'

She smiled with slow excitement, and raising her eyes looked at the door which she had heard someone open.

It was he, entering. She saw at once how he had contrived to maintain his disguise. His face was heavily covered with surgical bandages, clean and freshly put in place. His shabby hat was pulled over his eyes. He perceived her at once and moved to the table taking the seat opposite. Though the light of the wall-lamp behind her fell full upon his person it was impossible for her to discern his features. The bandaging had been skilfully arranged and the bottom part of his face was disguised as it had been before by a blue and white spotted foulard, which he wore round his throat. The mouth had been left partly free, and she could see a portion of his nostril. His teeth were firm and white; a few locks of black hair sprinkled with grey or powder fell on to the upturned collar of his overcoat.

The other occupants of the café gave him a passing stare, then one returned to his drink and the other to his scribbling.

"I must excuse myself, mademoiselle, for my unfortunate appearance. In experimenting with my work, I caused a slight explosion, and had to go to the hospital to have my face dressed." His voice, though his jaw moved with difficulty in the cloth of the bandages, was slow and pleasant.

Jenny said under her breath, "I congratulate you on your cleverness. The expedient is crude, but it serves. Do you want us to talk here? There are other people in the room and it is likely that we should be overheard."

"The rendezvous was of your Choosing." he replied, and leaning back in his chair, beckoned the waiter.

Jenny's eyes darted over his person, taking in every detail of his clothes, his linen and his hands. He had taken off his gloves, and made no attempt to disguise his hands. Never had she looked at anyone with such interest—even the buttons on his coat—even the threads of the green material of which it was made had a significance for her.

He ordered the usual supper, a ham omelette, bread and butter, dried fruit—anything they had; a litre of wine.

"A litre of wine," said Jenny leaning forward. "I had to see you."

"I suppose you are desperate, eh, mademoiselle?"

The young man with the scribbling-pad rose, left the money for his drink and went out. There remained only the workman in the blue blouse, who pulled out a clay pipe and started to fill it, appearing to be half asleep.

"We're as good as alone," said the man whom Jenny thought of as M. Bernard. "Now what do you want to say to me?"

"I don't think it can be said here," said Jenny, "this is just the beginning of our acquaintanceship."

"Ah! You think you are too clever. You think you are going to pit your wits against me!" He spoke low and in an expressive tone. "It is true that we cannot discuss much in this place, but I suppose that you wish to go carefully?"

"I have no intention of going carefully," replied Jenny, "I am prepared to risk anything. You would be indeed surprised, monsieur, if you knew how much I was prepared to risk."

"In what cause?" He leaned towards her; his eyes, peering through the bandages, took in the beauty that her light black lace veil only partly hid.

"You know in what cause."

Jenny would not mention her mother's name here. "What should concern you more is that I am prepared to pay a high price."

"How high?"

She thought that his voice was excited as well as curious as he added, "You are a very remarkable young woman:"

"Can you speak English?" asked jenny.

He shook his head.

"Never mind." Her smile was steady. "We must meet again. Somewhere privately."

"You would do that? Meet me privately?"

"Why not? I don't expect to do this business on my own terms."

He continued to stare at her under the shade of his hat, between the folds of the bandage, as if her callous boldness was surprising, even startling him.

The waiter came and put the poor food on the rough crockery before them; Jenny cut up the omelette on her cracked plate, broke her coarse bread, made a pretence of eating, putting morsels to her lips without moving her veil.

"I should like to see your face," her dreadful companion whispered when the waiter had shuffled away. "You are quite attractive, you know. I admire you as much as I admire your mother, and, until I met you, I always thought of her as the most beautiful woman that I had ever seen."

Jenny found it almost impossible to control the long shudder that seemed to rise like a cold wave from her heart, chilling her limbs; but contempt of her own cowardice steadied her; she threw back her veil and looked at him steadily. In that blurred and soiled light her fine features were delicate as a pastel drawing; her honeysuckle colouring, pink, cream, coral and pale gold, was heightened by the heavy dark bonnet and pelisse.

"You say that I am remarkable, monsieur—but you must have had a strange history. Where have you been—for so many years?"

These words were a mere breath on the lips that were faded from their natural rose hue, but still steady; her companion seemed flattered at her interest, he pushed aside the untouched food and rested his elbows on the wine-stained table.

"I wonder if the story of my adventures would move you to pity—to terror, or to disgust, mademoiselle. Eh, there are many people who could tell such tales nowadays. One can't live through revolutions and wars without seeing a few things."

"But your story must be more enthralling than that of most people," said Jenny quietly. "Some day you shall tell me all your experiences. Pray do not think me prudish or squeamish. I had the free education of an English girl."

He laughed as well as he could for the strappings about his face; she guessed his unspoken comment. "You're your mother's daughter, after all."

Jenny shyly put out her small exquisite hand and touched his, which rested on the table.

"Do you know where we could meet privately? I am ignorant where such places may be found and I have little liberty. Soon I shall have to return to England. My uncle will be coming to Paris—as it is I am watched; it is difficult for me to leave the Hôtel de Vernon."

She paused, but he did not speak; she guessed that he was waiting for her to disclose herself further. She did so, speaking her lines daintily.

"...if you could find some room, say in those streets behind the church of Saint-Roch—that is very convenient to my uncle's hôtel."

Did he understand this reference? It hardly mattered whether or not he realized that she had seen him kneeling in that gloomy building beside her mother—supposing he had looked over his shoulder that day and seen her watching from the shadows, would anything have been different? She tried to dismiss these idle, tormenting thoughts.

"If I could find such a room," he whispered, "would you come to it?"

"We must discuss—matters—somewhere privately. I told you I was prepared to pay a high price."

"Have you not paid that already? Even in coming here?"

They were speaking more freely, for the workman had left the café and the waiter had retired through the inner door; Jenny poured some wine into the two coarse glasses.

"Are you going to offer me money?" he asked harshly. "I know where to get all the money I want."

"You mean to have every penny she possesses?"

"Maybe. Power attracts me more than money. As a young man I was very ambitious. I cherished lofty designs. I wished to raise myself into a class into which I was not born, I longed to have magnificent adventures—even to marry a princess. It was, you understand, the age of romance, when everything seemed possible."

He tossed off the harsh wine quickly, Jenny saw his thin lips between the bandages stained red for a second. "I had many disappointments," he continued. "One gains what one dreamed of in the wrong way. And too late."

"Too late," repeated Jenny with her pleasantly fixed smile, then she added, rousing herself, "I understand, I am myself not altogether content with the dull life of a provincial schoolgirl in England. I could explain myself better if we were quite alone. Besides, this place is squalid."

"Why did you ask me to come here?"

"I knew of no other. I saw this when I visited the old German's shop."

She thought that he was uneasy, surprised and baffled by her cool attitude; this gave her added confidence. She filled his glass from the wine-bottle, then gathered up her gloves and reticule from the bench on which she sat.

"Yes—find some other rendezvous—for I must, monsieur, go now—"

"So soon?" His tone was suddenly violent. "I am afraid. I believe I was followed. I saw the man just now."

"Just now? That workman?"

"No, no; when I looked up—the door into the shop was slowly, quietly opened and this man peered in."

"I saw nothing."

"You were not looking. And he was gone immediately. That frightened me."

Her companion said, turning in his chair, with the quick movements of a hunted man: "I shall go and see if anyone is lurking outside the café."

"I was going to ask you to do so. My uncle, or my betrothed might have sent someone to watch me."

"Or some scoundrel might have followed you—you're pretty to be alone so late. Couldn't you have chosen quieter clothes?"

"Well, see if the street is empty; if it is, I'll stay a little while. If that man, in a blue redingote and a grey beaver hat and blond hair with a bundle of newspapers under his arm, is there, I'll go at once."

There was no doubt that he was uneasy and that he had swallowed her simple lie; she guessed that he had, in one or other of his disguises, had detectives and the police on his track.

He rose and left her. She watched him pass into the wineshop, the door swung to behind him. Jenny looked around her; she was alone in the dull, soiled little room; voices in dreary dispute could be faintly heard beyond the inner door; she had to be quick, it would not take him long to look for the man who had never been there. Her little hand went into her muff, drew out her silk purse and a small package that it contained. Then she moved towards her across the table her companion's wine-glass, which he had not touched since she had refilled it. She emptied a powder contained in a screw of silver paper into the wine and delicately replaced it; then she looked round again. It was

impossible that she had been observed; four blank walls, two closed doors, encompassed her. So far she was fortunate.

He returned.

"No one there," he said, and she wondered why she noted how warm and pleasant his tone was; strange that such a man should have so agreeable a voice. She sat back in her seat, her handkerchief to her lips, and asked him what surgeon had been induced to bandage his face so skilfully.

"I did it myself; I know a good many tricks."

She was glad now that she had never seen his face, either in the church or in the plantation at Sherlock; better that he should always remain featureless to her imagination.

She dropped her handkerchief and raised her glass.

"To our next meeting; we cannot talk here."

"You said that you would stay if you were not followed."

"I know. But I'm still afraid. I want to get away."

He glanced round, affected by her manner, made nervous by her terror that was not now feigned.

"What are your fears?" she mocked. "You, who have led a life of danger so long—so successfully?"

"I? I am afraid of nothing."

"Then drink to me."

He raised his glass.

"To your health—mademoiselle, the daughter of...!" His gulp of the acrid stuff filled the blank. "Vile! When next we meet we'll have Tokay or champagne."

Jenny rose with quick, delicate movements, thrusting her gloves, handkerchief and reticule into her muff.

"Don't follow me," she whispered, "have patience."

She was through the inner door into the shop where the old man in the fur cap still sat over the evening Journal. Jenny lowered her veil and held the lace gathered under her chin; her dreadful companion followed her and rang down on the counter a few coins, the price of that ghastly meal.

They were on the pavement together, he still harshly complaining of her sudden departure after her promise to stay. Jenny stood still, drawing on, finger by finger her puce-coloured gloves. Angered by her silence, he said under his breath, "Very well, as you please, my beauty. But you know that this means that I've got two instead of one under my thumb, don't you?"

"I know," whispered Jenny; she was glad of the cold wind blowing on her, of the cool rain that penetrated the fine mesh of her black veil; he lifted his hat in an insolent mocking of courtesy, and she saw the dark hair touched with an ashy hue, the brow grey in the sickly yellow light of the lamp above the German sea captain's shop. Her dreadful companion was so sure of her that he made no effort to stay her when she turned and walked slowly away down the sad, mean street towards the Place Vendôme.

As soon as she was out of his sight, she began to run, pausing now and then in the shadows of doorways, turning this way and that, until she was lost in the city that had now become alien and menacing like that city of which she had once dreamed. But she knew what to do. She did not run at random; her flight was to make it impossible for him to follow her; not that she thought that he would try to do so; he was too sure of her; he really believed that she was frightened and would hail the first passing fiacre and return, like a hare to her

form, to the Hôtel de Vernon. Jenny paused, gathered her strength, and stood still and resolute on the wet pavement; nothing as yet had gone wrong with her precisely arranged plan.

Then she walked soberly along, choosing the more respectable streets until she came into a better quarter; it was still early, there were a fair number of people about on foot and in carriages. Jenny turned and found her way to the Place Vendôme again, and from there to the river.

The wind was blowing the rain away, but the pavements were wet and her feet cold from hurrying over them; she had to hold her veil down in order to keep her face covered; she was fearful lest some passer-by should see and recognize her—a fantastic alarm.

She paused by the stone wall of the embankment; the quayside buildings rose above her with a sudden blot of darkness; she was glad of her chilled feet, of the physical discomfort of the rain and the wind.

Where had he gone? What was he doing now? How long would it take? Overhead the lights of the city cast a dull tawny glow into the loosely moving clouds; below the river was darkness broken here and there by the sparkles from the reflected light of the lanterns set on the parapet.

Jenny looked about her with a glance as furtive and keen as that she had cast round the room behind the wine-shop when she had drawn her companion's wine-glass towards her; at first there were a few people hastening home out of the wet night, then none.

Jenny pulled off her gloves, rolled them into her muff, then resting this on the parapet allowed it to slip over into the river beneath; she was glad to be rid of it; the burden had been considerable on her frail arm, for it contained a bronze paper-weight that she had taken from her uncle's bureau before she had left the Hôtel de Vernon; she listened for the splash that told her that the muff that contained, with handkerchief, gloves and reticule, the silver paper that had wrapped some of the ingredients sent her by M. Follope to make eau de Rouen, had sunk through the dark waters of the Seine to the mud at the bottom. Then, with a sensation of supreme elation, she turned away and stopped the first fiacre she saw; she was proud of her cool head; she had remembered to take her purse of money from the muff.

Jenny had ordered the cocher to drive her to an elegant little theatre where a company of marionettes was charming fashionable audiences; a friend, Madame Jorard, had asked her to share a loge that evening and Jenny had accepted. The performance had not reached the first interlude; the attendant conducted Jenny to her friend's box, and she joined the party in the half dark, whispering brief apologies for being so late—she had waited for an escort who had been prevented from coming. There were murmured greetings, the puppets were entrancing and no one allowed the enjoyment of them to be broken by this late arrival; it was usual enough for fashionable ladies to be unpunctual.

Jenny sat at the back of the loge, and as the others again became absorbed in the antics of the marionettes, she passed quietly into the little boudoir behind the box where the ladies had left their cloaks. She had thought of everything. In the pocket of her prune-coloured silk dress was a case of cosmetics; she took off her bonnet, combed her hair, powdered and rouged her face until it looked like that of a pretty little doll, then put on her bonnet and arranged the veil coquettishly.

She felt as passionless as the marionettes; there was mud on the hem of her gown; she thought, 'It is very ordinary, but the colour is rather unusual. I must leave before the lights go up—there are a number of them, they are gay, I don't suppose that they will miss me.'

There were several places to which she could have gone that evening; but she had chosen this because it was a homely entertainment where fashionable people went in afternoon gowns and where, in the half dark, her plain attire would not be remarked. She endured the mimic opera, of which she saw nothing, for another hour, then made her excuses to Madame Jorard, who thought that her carriage was calling for her, and hastened away before the candles were lit and the lamps turned up. Another hired carriage brought her to the Hôtel de Vernon; it was not yet eleven o'clock, but her work was not finished.

'Have I forgotten anything? No, nothing.'

In the little cosmetics case she had a key of the servant's side door, which she had taken from Madame Maillot's basket earlier in the day.

This allowed her 'to reach her room, unobserved by the back staircase; she tried not to think of the escalier dérobé at Sherlock Manor House. She took off her gown and shawl, hastily put on the darkest dress she could find, one of ink-blue taffeta, and wrapped the other garments round an object that she had hidden in her wardrobe—a large flat-iron that she had taken from her maid's cupboard that morning.

The bundle was heavy and awkward, but Jenny felt neither fatigue nor emotion; awaiting her chance when all was still in the great house, she hastened down the back stairs and again turned towards the river.

'I will imagine that I am one of those marionettes, that someone is pulling the strings, that I do not know what I am doing.'

The pretty little china clock was striking midnight and Jenny was safe in the refuge of her room. The last time had not been so easy; she had had to lurk about in the shadows before she had found the chance of sending her second bundle into the river; but it had been done.

'Now there is only one thing to do, I have forgotten nothing.'

The handsome room looked cheerful, a clear fire was burning on the wide hearth—was this in the same city as the dirty little café where the stranger with a bandaged face had drunk at a gulp a glass of strong sour wine?

She cast off her long dark Andalusian shawl, her shoes, and called the maid who came from the boudoir.

"My shawl is damp, my shoes ruined:—Madame Jorard's carriage could not get near the theatre, so we foolishly decided to walk."

The girl exclaimed at the spoiled shoes and damp shawl, but suspected nothing—'Why should she?' thought Jenny, as she placed the key of the back door on her dressing-table; tomorrow she would give that to Madame Maillot, and she too would be unsuspicious when Jenny said that she had found it dropped on the stairs.

The maid hung the shawl over a chair near the fire and brought Jenny's bed-gown and slippers.

"Shall I bring you anything to eat, mademoiselle?"

Jenny remembered the last food she had looked at—the supper served in Le Gros Chêne.

"No, but tomorrow you can begin to pack—I shall be returning to England very soon. Now go to bed and leave me alone, please; I have a headache, that is why I left the theatre so soon."

Jenny sat alone, gazing into the fire from which she felt no heat.

Had she remembered everything?

There was one precaution still to take; she pulled the bell-cord by her side, and when the maid, half-undressed, came, said:

"I forgot—I want to destroy that powder which was sent in the package from the chemist—you recall, to make the eau de Rouen—I heard tonight that it was very dangerous—a poison. I will not keep it in the house. Please bring it. You saw where I put it."

"Yes, mademoiselle."

The girl brought a small scarlet silk box from the dressing-table that Jenny opened, showing some fine white powder in a paper.

"Is that poison, mademoiselle?"

"So they say. You shall see me burn it—we will find another face wash."

"Mademoiselle does not need one."

Jenny cast the contents of the box into the fire.

"There, it has gone. Now go to bed, I shall not disturb you again."

Jenny, with a smile that gave her small face a dreadful expression, watched the paper that contained powdered sugar burn in the heart of the flames.

'Nothing forgotten now? Nothing.'

Fatigue felled her like a blow, her senses began to fail; her vision was blurred as she put out the lamp, her step unsteady as she stumbled into bed, still wearing her gown and slippers.

When Jenny awoke she saw her mother sitting by her bedside, holding back the curtains in her right hand and gazing at her anxiously.

Jenny did not speak, she lay motionless on the pillows. Her sleep had been so interrupted by violent dreams and agitated awakenings that she believed at first this was some hallucination, for Lady Sherlock's sweet figure had frequently crossed the wild visions of that restless night.

But the cold impact of reality disturbed these desperate imaginings. It was Lady Sherlock herself, wearing her travelling-dress of grey-ribbed silk, her black straw bonnet tied under her chin, her veil thrown back.

"Why have you come so unexpectedly?" said Jenny, without moving.

And Lady Sherlock, in a tone that matched her daughter's for stillness and lack of expression, replied:

"I arrived here late last night, they said that you had gone to bed. Madame Maillot appeared worried about you. I would not have them wake you for me."

"I woke often enough, Mother," replied Jenny. "But you, have you sat up all night in your travelling-clothes?"

"No, I took them off," said Lady Sherlock. "This morning I was out early. I went to the church of Saint-Roch as usual. Jenny"—she leaned forward suddenly—"what do you know about me? What have you discovered?"

"Those are two questions," replied Jenny, sitting up and speaking resolutely, "that you must never ask me, Mother, and no matter how often you should ask me, I shall never reply. I might lie to you, deceive you, cajole you, throw you off the truth by a hundred devious ways, but I shall never answer you candidly."

In the colourless light of the early morning the two faces that looked at each other so sternly were much alike, for fatigue and bitter experience had effaced

much of the bloom from Jenny's youthful face, and the indeterminate shadows cast by the draperies of bed and window softened the lines and hollows of Lady Sherlock's expression so that there remained only in both mother and daughter their common heritage of delicate bone and fine modelling, of pale colouring, and that aristocratic expression of control, pride, calmness, that on both their faces masked all passion and emotion.

"Then you know something," said Lady Sherlock. She moved back in her chair, but still stared at her daughter; her voice was perfectly under control. "I wonder how you found out. I tried—and when I try I generally succeed—to keep everything from you. I wanted you to marry Frank and go away, I suppose you noticed that—how determined I was to keep you clear of it?"

"Yes," said Jenny. She shivered; the room was chill, for Lady Sherlock had not allowed the maid to come in and light the fire, and Jenny's night-chemise was thin. "I understood. I don't know how I found it, whatever it was I did find out; but I shall not tell you anything. I'm not even admitting that I know anything, Mother. Need you ask? Would it matter?"

"I suppose not."

"As for that, how did you know that I knew? How was it you followed me to Paris?"

"Half-suggestions, a word here, a look there."

"You must understand, this you must understand, Mother—that I never spied on you."

"I did not suppose it," said the elder woman with a tremor in her voice at last, "But I know that if you had spied on me, Jenny, it would have been done in love."

"You mustn't talk of it, Mother, it won't bear words. It's over now. Don't you understand, Mother, it's over."

"Jenny, how can you say that? You know it is a lie. It will never be over save with my life. And perhaps that won't be very long."

"Promise me, Mother, to wait for a few days. Not long, I should think, I don't quite know. But you must believe me that when this interval is over you are free."

"I don't know what you're saying, my poor Jenny. I don't believe you know yourself. I wonder how much you found out. I wonder how much you understood. I can't forbear trying to justify myself, I wanted to tell you about it—how young I was and desperate, how poor we were, living in a cellar."

"Don't tell me, Mother."

But Lady Sherlock continued in a monotonous tone.

"I wonder if you can understand, Jenny—I was stupid, lazy and passionate, frightened of the loneliness and the poverty. It was all lies about the comfort we had. When M. de Saint-Alde died there was nothing left. I don't know if he never had much money or if we'd been robbed. I was a child, not understanding these things. Remember, Jenny, I was a child."

"Mother, you mustn't tell me, you mustn't speak."

"He," said Lady Sherlock, with fierce emphasis on the pronoun, "was my complete master, I tell you, we were living in rags in a cellar. I suppose you found out how he used me, how he made me get his living for him?"

"Never mind what I found out, Mother," said Jenny, with a strength that was greater than that of the elder woman's.

"I was so young and stupid that I kept a diary. It was a relief to write down at the end of the day something in that little book. When they came to look for me he fled. I don't know if they suspected anything. I had just a little money to take a decent lodging. I made up a tale—"

"No more, Mother, no more!"

"Jenny, I should never have married, I should have gone into a convent. I wanted to. Through it all, through the worst of it, I never lost pride, pride of birth. They appealed to that; they said that people would suspect something. It is a poor thing to sacrifice your all—your father, my unborn children—to just my pride of birth. I thought of expiation, also. You know the Home I took you to, Jenny?"

"I understand it all, Mother, without another word passing between us."

Jenny rose from the bed, took the Andalusian shawl which Madelon had dried for her the night before and put it over her bedgown.

"How chill the room is, and grey. Mother, I'm coming back to England with you. I don't think we'll come to Paris again for a while."

She kept carefully away from her mother, not touching her or looking at her.

"Could we go somewhere—Venice? I have a mind to go away, and you too, I think. Mother, we shall never be like other people, you and I, again."

"No, Jenny, I understand that. This sets us apart. You know, of course, that I would sooner have died than this had happened."

"We'll go away," said Jenny, drawing the shawl closer over her slight breast. "Perhaps Aunt Beardie could come too. Mother, was she your friend or your enemy in this?—I could never understand."

Lady Sherlock remained motionless, the bonnet shading her face. Jenny had an impression for a moment that she was looking at a lay figure, that there was no life behind that shawl, the grey pelisse, in the hands on the puce-coloured gloves folded in the lap. She thought of a marionette she had seen the night before jerked by the strings.

"Mother!" she cried. For the first time her emotion showed.

At that word Lady Sherlock turned and then rose.

"Hush!" she said. "We have been very quiet so far, do not let us disturb our tranquillity by babbling now. Perhaps there is still something you do not understand."

"I spoke about Mlle de Saint-Alde, Mother. I always used to think when you spoke of her and showed us that little drawing, that she died in your arms from typhus. Then when she came back so strangely after so many adventures, not a pretty young woman any more—you've always been so pretty, Mother, that it was strange to think that she, who was your age, had become crabbed, sour and old. I thought it must have meant a good deal to you to see her again."

"Yes," said Lady Sherlock, "it did mean a great deal, Jenny."

"Then I suppose she was your friend. But what happened to her in Hamburg, why didn't he torment her also? But I don't suppose I should ask questions. It doesn't matter now. But I thought, if she was your dear friend—Did she say anything to you about me, Mother?"

Jenny broke off to ask this question. "Because I had to tell her something, she knows what I have been trying to do."

Lady Sherlock was silent for a full moment, and again Jenny had that dreadful impression that her mother's whole personality and spirit were so

withdrawn that what remained was almost a lifeless body, a waxwork or an automaton.

When Lady Sherlock did speak it was slowly and carefully.

"Your Aunt Beardie—that is a queer name, isn't it?—did not come to England. The Dower House has been shut up. She's very eccentric, you know, Jenny. Perhaps she has returned to her rooms in Versailles."

"Didn't you know," exclaimed Jenny, "that she has left the Hôtel de Vernon?" Now that they had come to a matter that was to the girl not of great importance, her tone became more natural and a normal warmth returned to her cheeks, the sparkle to her eyes.

She remembered what had happened yesterday with an enormous sense of relief. Her quick mind darted over the events of yesterday evening, she had omitted nothing. She thought of the muff held down in the mud at the bottom of the river by the brass paperweight and the prune-coloured silk dress also wrapped round the flat-iron, safely washed over by the dark waves of the Seine. She thought of her carefully arranged visit to the marionette theatre and of two highly placed ladies who would be witnesses to her presence there. She felt almost joyful and forgot to watch her mother's face. She did not see the spasm that crossed those precise features so like her own, the wild glance in those gentle eyes that she had always seen so soft and shining, the strain of that delicate mouth which did not seem made to express violent passion.

"We'll say nothing more now, Jenny," said Lady Sherlock very carefully. "We must not talk of anything. One of us, you know, might suddenly go mad. Women have lost their wits from less than this. Often I've felt my reason unsettled. But the great quiet and peace with your father and the children at Sherlock saved me. They must be very quiet now. Yes, we will go abroad, you and I. I can find some excuse for your father and the others. I'm not really wanted, I've always been so much apart. I'll say you're ill and I'm taking you abroad—that's a fair excuse. Many ladies have been ill for weeks. We'll go away from all of them, you and I. Yes," said Lady Sherlock, "but first I am going to Versailles to see your Aunt Beardie. Don't come near me, Jenny, don't touch me. Never try to kiss me again until I give you permission."

"Everything, Mother, shall be as you command."

Jenny, with the shawl over her chemise, stood by the hearth; behind her were the ashes of yesterday's fire, which had burned the little packet containing the white sugar that Madelon, the maid, had given her from the package labelled eau de Rouen.

At the door Lady Sherlock turned.

"Remember," she whispered, "though it is hardly necessary to tell you, Jenny, for you understand everything as well as I do—at least, you understand in spirit if you do not know all the facts—we must think of the family, your father's and mine. We are serving them, nothing else."

"Something more than that, Mother," answered Jenny. "I did it for you."

Lady Sherlock did not question this remark, but went quietly down the stairs; Jenny stood alone before the cold ashes.

Late that afternoon, when it was completely dark, Lady Sherlock got out of a hired carriage in the main street of Versailles and told the man to wait for her a few hours later in front of the main gates of the château, then hastened on the same way that Jenny had hastened three days previously when she had visited M. Follope, the chemist.

But Lady Sherlock moved with the certainty of one who knew her way. She did not enter the chemist's shop, in the low windows of which a dim light still glowed out in the darkness of the winter evening.

The lady was disguised in the humble attire of a French housewife of the meaner sort—a black linen shawl, her black-and-white-check shirt, her plain black straw bonnet with the coarse veil were clumsily arranged so as to disguise the grace and dignity of her deportment. Her feet were hidden in broad coarse shoes, and woollen gloves were pulled over her delicate hands.

She made her way rapidly, looking neither to right nor left, nor pausing, to the house where Jenny had had her interview with the man she believed to be M. Bernard, the house the key of which she had been given at the chemist's shop.

Lady Sherlock entered the damp courtyard, and pausing, looked up at the windows. They were all black and difficult to see, for the only light came from the murky rays of the lamp over the small gateway that led into the street. The topmost boughs of the leafless trees showed above the left wing of the house, Lady Sherlock could hardly discern them moving against the darkening sky that was only faintly smudged with light from the distant illumination of the city.

The door was closed and she pulled the iron bell. She peered about, becoming accustomed to the shifting half-light, the dense shadows, and saw the faint glow of a lamp behind one of the lower barred windows. This moved when she clanged the bell a second time, and the concierge unbolted the door and appeared, looking suspiciously above the lantern he held.

"I've come to see Mlle de Saint-Alde," said Lady Sherlock firmly. "I'm an old friend of hers, perhaps she is expecting me."

"I don't know whether she's in or not," replied the man sulkily. "She doesn't tell me where she's going."

"You must have some idea, I suppose," said Lady Sherlock, entering the dark passage.

"How should I know, madame? Mlle de Saint-Alde is a very strange person, as anyone in Versailles will tell you. Sometimes she remains shut up there for days"—jerking his head up the stairs—"only going out after dark to buy a little wine and food. Then she'll be away for weeks, visiting her grand friends, I suppose. Everyone knows she could have apartments in the château if she wished."

"I'll go upstairs and see if she is there," said Lady Sherlock. "If she is, I'm sure she will wish to receive me."

"She was there this morning," said the man. "She came and leaned over the stairs and said she felt ill. I advised her to go to the chemist's or the doctor, but she would have none of that and went back into her room. And since then I've not seen her."

"She's a tenant, surely, who gives you very little trouble," said Lady Sherlock sternly. "You might, I think, be a little more civil."

"She gives a great deal of trouble," replied the man, raising his lamp so that the lady could see her way up the dirty stairs. "Although she has so many great friends and is petted by everybody, never a sou of her money do I see."

When Lady Sherlock had reached the first landing, which was lit by a small lamp standing on a bracket, the old man returned, grumbling, to his apartment.

Well did Lady Sherlock know why Aunt Beardie had selected, after changing her apartment many times, this wretched and dismal place for her permanent residence. It was not overlooked, it was too uncomfortable and in too bad repair to be sought after, and therefore the lower floor and the upper both remained untenanted; and the concierge, a cobbler by trade, was like Aunt Beardie herself—an eccentric who lived alone, a miser who would not spend a sou that he could avoid laying out, and a man whose senses were failing, who had neither keen eyes nor sharp wits nor acute hearing, but who was fuddled by age and semi-imbecility.

'A fitting gate-keeper,' thought Lady Sherlock wearily.

She paused before the door to which Jenny had been given the key.

It was, to her surprise, unlocked now. She pushed it open and entered the narrow passage that divided the apartment. This at first was completely dark, and she had to stand still until her eyes became accustomed to the gloom. Then she could make out the faint glimmer of the window at the end of the passage, the faint shapes of the doors to right and left.

That chamber full of lumber, which Jenny had entered at first, Lady Sherlock avoided, and turning to that opposite knocked on it with something of the courage her daughter had shown.

When there was no answer she turned the handle and, entering the room, 'said in a loud voice:

"It is no use for you to play any more tricks on me. Do you hear, Bernard? I am no longer afraid of you. This is the end."

She paused, not for gathering her courage, but for controlling her deep-seated fury.

"I told you if you ever involved my daughter... Where are you? Hiding somewhere? A childish device to frighten me?"

She moved into the room; it was quite dark, but she knew where the lamp usually stood on the table inside the hall. As it had been with her daughter, when she had come on her errand to this same shameful lodging, Lady Sherlock's hands did not tremble; there was a depth of fortitude in both these women.

She lit the lamp, and as she watched the small flame rise from the wick she could see her daughter, her own girlhood. Pride of birth, as she had told Jenny, was her predominant emotion. She put that, her sense of her obligation to her name—one of the noblest in the Breton armorial—even before her affection for her husband and her children. She did not put it before her feeling for Jenny, for that was so much part of herself that she could not think of herself and her daughter as separate beings.

"You've forgotten, I suppose," she said, turning round and speaking as if there were somebody in the room, "that there have been heroes, and heroines, too, in my family, men and women who have stopped at nothing. It was for the sake of honour, to preserve the honour of others, that I acted as I did."

She raised the lamp and crossed to the middle of the room, looking about her.

"I know where you are. Lying on your bed, as usual. You intend to make me wait on you as a servant. You want me to see you in your filth and degradation as we saw each other once in filth and degradation when I plied that shameful commerce for you..."

She ceased speaking. It was part of her breeding to forbear putting some things into words. To steady herself she stood still, looking round the room.

It was in more than its usual disorder and squalor. Two empty wine-bottles and soiled plates stood on the table; broken corsets, tattered silk skirts, a large pair of shoes were flung on a chair. The door of a cupboard swung open and revealed within a man's green coat, a pair of top-boots, a freshly laundered shirt hanging on pegs.

"I shall tell my husband. I shall tell my brother," said Lady Sherlock. "They will find means of silencing you without making such a scandal public. I have many friends and relatives. My family has been respected, some members of it loved. You will no longer be feared. Do you hear? My honour will be saved. If you take the diary to my husband or my brother they will not believe you, they will destroy it. Bernard! Why do you not answer me?"

Holding the lamp steadily she advanced to the inner door and pulled it open.

"I do not fear you, I tell you. Because I have resolved to destroy myself. I warned you that if you touched my daughter—"

She peered round the room that was familiar to her in its general appearance, for the strange objects that Aunt Beardie accumulated there varied from day to day, as if during the long hours when she must have been enclosed in these filthy apartments she found some relief or even pleasure from the monotony of her loneliness, in taking out her odd assortment of treasures and turning them over.'

Now on the table lay a plaster mask, some sugar falling out of a blue paper cone, a bag with purple strings, a broken cellarette, some sugar-tongs, some old newspapers, a bouquet of straw flowers in a wooden frame. A piece of magnificent embroidery was fixed up at the window, standing about on chairs and tables were pewter, silver and bronze candlesticks. Lady Sherlock noticed that the candles had burned out in a swill of grease in all of them. The bed was unmade. It had never been, in her knowledge of the place, provided with linen; the ragged soiled blankets and quilts were now tossed here and there over the bed-posts and thrown on the floor as if they had been disordered in some brutal struggle.

Tangled among them was Aunt Beardie's usual costume, the black bombazine skirt, the shawl, the bonnet with the lace veil, the rusty wig with the chenille net, even the two long gold earrings that she usually wore.

Lady Sherlock stared at these objects, then passed quickly round the bed, still holding the lamp.

Aunt Beardie lay cramped on the floor, rolled in a frilled linen night garment that fitted her like a shroud, a night-cap with deep ruches of faded lace tied under her chin. The contours of her face, the open mouth, the turned-up eyes, the sunken nostrils seemed to be carved out of hard yellow wood; the lips were fixed in a grin round her strong white teeth.

At first Lady Sherlock felt nothing when she gazed at this sight. She thought: 'If drop the lamp I shall set the place on fire and everything will be discovered.'

So she put the lamp down carefully, finding a place for it among the rubbish on the table. Then she went down on one knee, bending above the corpse.

'No peace there,' she thought, 'not a tranquil death.'

In the crooked fingers was a slip of paper. Lady Sherlock drew it away from that stiff grasp and read it in the light of her lamp. The words were written with a pencil that seemed to have been guided by a hand cramped with agony.

Is this the end of all the glorious hopes? All that you dreamed when lying on your pallet bed? You are old, vile—loathed. Wretch, daily you become more filthy and disgusting, a monster—

A message, but to whom?

More incoherent words, and then a line was drawn with uneven emphasis; at the bottom of the paper in fainter handwriting were the words: I cannot endure many of these spasms. Is it possible that I have been poisoned? If I die, let whoever finds me look for the diary of Mlle de Vernon in the top drawer of the little bureau under the window.

Lady Sherlock crushed the writing into her reticule. She looked at the corpse without a sense of either horror or regret. All her faculties and energies were concentrated now on the danger of her position.

She had spoken with great sincerity when she had said she was ready to destroy herself. She had others to think of. It was not the thought of her own safety that had inspired her; she was urged on by the desire to preserve the secret that had been hers for so many years and that might now, she began to hope, never be discovered. With skill and rapidity she found the drawer indicated in the note in the words traced by the dying hand.

There it was, the diary that she herself had written a generation ago in Hamburg during her life of pitiful degradation.

It was not a well-kept diary. She turned the leaves now. The dates were random, sometimes for weeks there was no entry. There were prayers. there were ejaculations of despair, there were cold and bitter facts, there were names of men and there were entries of payments, some in her own handwriting, some in that of the man who had been her first lover.

She took the book and clasped it to her breast and stood still for a moment. Was there anything else? Anything she had omitted or overlooked? He had never had any hold on her but this one diary. After he had come into her life again with his cool, "I am your old friend Mlle de Saint-Alde, you do not know me?" thus stating at once the part he intended to play, they had communicated only in the most cautious fashion.

There was nothing else of hers here, no letter, no clue. She believed that this, her last visit to this foul place, could be covered up.

What was there to do now? Only to keep her nerve for Jenny's sake, for the sake of Jenny's family and her own family. No one would ever know the truth of this mystery.

She remembered her brother's influence and power. She had only to say to him, "An impostor! A swindler! I was deceived. No need to make inquiries," and her brother would help her to keep everything from her husband, even from Frank Quarry, who could marry Jenny if she would let him.

Lady Sherlock put out the lamp. She was not only safe, out avenged. And then through the cold courage that upheld her, a faint spasm of pity swept. Once he had been young and ardent and ambitious. What had he written on that paper?—'The bright dreams and glorious hopes.' He had not intended to be vile. What had he said when he returned to her? He had hoped to marry her, and her people had claimed her and he had fled in fear and shame. And there had been many adventures, things had not gone well with him. Among all this broken trash, this humiliating disguise, his life had ended.

If she had had a crucifix she would have put it on his distorted breast. If it had been in her power to send a priest to him—she was thinking in terms of her old faith now, the faith that had once been his and hers...

"Farewell, Bernard! I do not hate you."

The sound of her own voice was sinister in her ears. She moved rapidly away.

What to do, what to say to the concierge? She paused in the hall.

Call him? Tell him that his eccentric lodger was ill? Creep away and say nothing?

That would be better. The man would surely never be able to identify her. Never be able to connect the poor woman who had come to call on Mlle de Saint-Alde, with Lady Sherlock. Some cry, some scandal there must be, but there could be no reason to connect her with it.

She fled through the dark streets of Versailles like a creature blown by the wind, fragile and as light of foot as her young daughter. She reached the fiacre—although it was before the time she had appointed, it was already at the gates of the château—and told the coachman to drive back to Paris.

Free!

Free from what and free to do what?

The others were safe, she had not brought down two families to humiliation and disgrace, into ridicule and scandal. For her—life was over, and she supposed for Jenny, too. Like another Iphigenia, Jenny had sacrificed her youth, her beauty, her hopes of a lover—or so her mother believed. The one untouched, unblemished woman had expiated the unmentionable shame and disgrace of that other tarnished woman of her own race.

When Lady Sherlock reached the Hôtel de Vernon she was wearing the clothes that she had taken with her in a bundle under her shawl. She had changed into them in the cab. They were plain, but not such as to cause comment. Nor would the disguise she had been wearing be noticed by her servant, since she was used to buying such suits of clothes for the inmates of her home in London.

She asked where Mlle Geneviève was and was told she was in the church—Jenny praying?

Lady Sherlock wrote at once to her brother, ending with these words:

> We have all been most shamefully deceived. You will understand what I mean when you hear that we have been duped by an impostor.
> Ask nothing, and endeavour to have as little public scandal as possible. You will know how to contrive this.

She sent this letter off by one of her servants to Brittany and then she went upstairs to her room, suddenly tired, as her daughter had been suddenly tired last night after her return from the marionette theatre. And she thought through the deep cloud of her weariness. 'Why should he have died so suddenly—strong and vigorous? That was one of my terrors, he was likely to live so long.'

She sat down by the fire that was burning brightly on the large marble hearth. She was there, motionless, when Jenny returned from the church.

"Mother, you have been away so long."

"Hush!" said Lady Sherlock with a sudden fierce animation. "Do not ask me where I've been nor what I've seen. You said that you would answer no questions this morning, neither shall I."

"No," said Jenny, sinking on her knees beside her mother. "But there's one thing that I must tell you. I thought I'd omitted nothing, I thought I'd forgotten nothing."

"What do you mean?"

"I must tell you this—the diary, the most important thing of all, I've forgotten. Can you forgive me? I am not fit to be forgiven."

Lady Sherlock, without smiling or speaking, took a book bound in tattered paper covers, in which was a childish painting of a moss rose, from her reticule and showed it to her daughter.

"This is the diary."

"Mother! How did you get it? How did you know?"

Lady Sherlock did not reply.

Tearing out the leaves of the book one by one she cast them into the flames, and they burned swiftly as the packet had burned that jenny had thrown into the fire the night before.

When the astonishing discovery was made at Versailles, Lady Sherlock and her daughter were in England and there was nothing whatever to connect them with the disconcerting revelation—a revelation, however, that caused little stir, for it was but little known. Everything was done very correctly; seals were put on the rooms full of disorder and miscellaneous objects; an inventory was taken of everything. Some of the finest pieces of embroidery were sent to the museums. There were no reports in the newspapers and an air of mystery was allowed to settle over the whole occurrence.

Romantic stories grew up with the rapidity of mushrooms. It was even said that this strange personage was King Louis XVII or some famous Royalist who had chosen this grotesque and sinister disguise in which to end his days.

Since the assistance of the medical profession was not considered necessary for a person who had been dead several days, no investigation was made into the cause of the sudden death, though there were some who ventured to whisper that the unknown might have poisoned himself in an excess of despair. But why despair? Had he not been well received everywhere? No one had penetrated his disguise. Think of the rooms in the royal château, the pension, the gifts! Why, he must surely have been someone most distinguished, of royal birth even, to have been received so warmheartedly everywhere.

And what of the people who declared they had known him for years? And what of the love-letters? Had he written them himself? And his amazing skill at embroidery, cookery, at telling romantic stories!

The quick gossip might circulate as it would, the affair was allowed to drop into oblivion. When such an occurrence is not commented on it is soon forgotten. M. de Vernon was in a position to gloss over and hush up any troublesome or vexatious affairs likely to affect his family; another revolution caused such incidents to be quickly forgotten.

The Dower House was closed and Lady Sherlock transferred her interest in the Home at Fulham to the pious friends who had helped her so far in that good work. A familiar and evasive excuse was offered. Her health would no longer permit of her undertaking such duties.

To Frank Quarry, Jenny said "No," though he stood before her conscious that there was much in her life that he must not share and declared that he would take her as she was, no matter what she had seen or done, what desperate secret she shared with another. Jenny refused him, scarcely seeing him.

And, soon after, Lady Sherlock and her daughter left Sherlock for Italy; long after this affair was forgotten, buried in official documents, still undisturbed by seekers after sensational historical mysteries, they were still away from home.

Sir Robert acquiesced in the continued and long absences of his wife from Sherlock; perhaps he too knew something. No questions were asked, no comments were made.

When Sir Robert died, some ten years after the adventure; the two ladies went to reside permanently abroad. Sir Robert had left several male members of his own family who were capable of acting as guardians to his young son and younger daughter.

At first the two women wrote to the tutors, the governesses, to Fanny and Bobby. Then these letters ceased. The ladies had an adequate fortune and were understood to be living in seclusion.

Frank Quarry could not forget Jenny, who was possessed, he was assured, of fair qualities as well as the beauty that most pleased his mind, his spirits and his senses. Stung by loneliness and that passion for what is lost that is one of the most poignant of human desires, he pursued the two ladies across Italy, though with but scanty clues.

One night he thought he saw them in a gondola in Venice but they were gone too swiftly. Only, from the window of the palace from which he looked down he could see the two slender figures leaning towards each other on the cushioned seats, silent, withdrawn from the world one of them looked up as they passed.

He never saw them again, and he never knew that in that second he had gazed into the pure face of a murderess.