

CHAPTER I

Two friends were sitting together outside the Café des Tribunaux at Dieppe. One of them was falling in love; the other, an untidy and morose little man, was wasting advice. It was the hour of coffee and liqueurs, on an August evening.

"You are," said the adviser irritably, "at the very beginning of a career. You have been surprisingly fortunate; there's scarcely a novelist in England who wouldn't be satisfied with such reviews as yours, and it's your first book. Think: twelve months ago you were a clerk in the city, and managed to place about three short stories a year at a guinea each. Then your aunt what-was-her-name left you the thousand pounds, and you chucked your berth and sat down to a novel. 'Nothing happens but the unforeseen'—the result justified you. You sold your novel; you got a hundred quid for it; and *The Saturday*, and *The Spectator*, and every paper whose opinion is worth a rush, hails you as a coming light. For you to consider marrying now would be flying in the face of a special providence."