

'Regina has gone into the dining-room to wait for us,' she said. 'I see you don't like your position here; and I won't keep you more than a few minutes longer. You are, of course, at a loss to understand what I was saying to you when the knock at the door interrupted us. Sit down again for five minutes; it fidgets me to see you standing there, looking at your boots. I told you I had one possible consolation still left. Judge for yourself what the hope of it is to me, when I own to you that I should long since have put an end to my life without it. Don't think I am talking nonsense; I mean what I say. It is one of my misfortunes that I have no religious scruples to restrain me. There was a time when I believed that religion might comfort me. I once opened my heart to a clergyman—a worthy person, who did his best to help me. All useless! My heart was too hard, I suppose. It doesn't matter—except to give you one more proof that I am thoroughly in earnest. Patience! patience! I am coming to the point. I asked you some odd questions, on the day when you first dined here. You have forgotten all about them of course?'

'I remember them perfectly well,' Amelius answered.

'You remember them? That looks as if you had thought about them afterwards. Come! tell me plainly, what did you think?'

Amelius told her plainly. She became more and more interested, more and more excited, as he went on.

'Quite right!' she exclaimed, starting to her feet and walking swiftly backwards and forwards in the room. 'There is a lost girl whom I want to find; and she is between sixteen and seventeen years old, as you thought. Mind! I have no reason—not the shadow of a reason—for believing that she is still a living creature. I have only my own stupid obstinate conviction; rooted here,' she pressed both hands fiercely on her heart, 'so

that nothing can tear it out of me! I have lived in that belief—O, don't ask me how long! it is so far, so miserably far to look back!' She stopped in the middle of the room. Her breath came and went in quick, heavy gasps; the first tears that had softened the hard wretchedness in her eyes rose in them now, and transfigured them with the divine beauty of maternal love. 'I won't distress you,' she said, stamping on the floor, as she struggled with the hysterical passion that was raging in her. 'Give me a minute, and I'll force it down again.'

She dropped into a chair, threw her arms heavily on the table, and laid her head on them. Amelius thought of the child's frock and cap hidden in the cabinet. All that was manly and noble in his nature felt for the unhappy woman, whose secret was dimly revealed to him now. The little selfish sense of annoyance at the awkward situation in which she had placed him, vanished to return no more. He approached her, and put his hand gently on her shoulder. 'I am truly sorry for you,' he said. 'Tell me how I can help you, and I will do it with all my heart.'

'Do you really mean that?' She roughly dashed the tears from her eyes, and rose as she put the question. Holding him with one hand, she parted the hair back from his forehead with the other. 'I must see your whole face,' she said—'your face will tell me. Yes; you do mean it. The world hasn't spoilt you yet. Do you believe in dreams?'

Amelius looked at her, startled by the sudden transition. She deliberately repeated her question.

'I ask you seriously,' she said; 'do you believe in dreams?'

Amelius answered seriously, on his side. 'I can't honestly say that I do.'

'Ah!' she exclaimed, 'like me. I don't believe in dreams, either—I wish I did! But it's not in me to believe in superstitions; I'm too hard—and I'm sorry for it. I have seen people