

termination always from henceforth to be absolutely sincere with himself, and with those whom he really loved.

"I am sure there is no more exact measure. Hermione, it is very difficult, I think, to realise what any human being is, to judge any one quite accurately. Some judge a nature by the distance it can sink, others by the distance it can rise. Which do you do? Do you judge Delarey by his act of faithlessness? And, if you do, how would you judge me?"

"You!"

There was a sound of wonder in her voice.

"Yes. You say I am an egoist. And this that I am saying will seem to you egoism. It is egoism, I suppose. But I want to know—I must know. How would you judge me? How do you judge me?"

She was silent.

"How are you judging me at this moment? Aren't you judging me by the distance I could fall, the distance, perhaps, you think I have fallen?"

He spoke slowly. He was delaying. For all the time he spoke he was secretly battling with his pride,—and his pride was a strong fighter. But to-night his passion for sincerity, his instinct that for Hermione—and for him too—salvation lay in their perfect, even in their cruel sincerity to themselves and to each other, was a strong fighter also. In it his pride met an antagonist that was worthy of it. And he went on.

"Are you judging me by this summer?"

He paused.

"Go on," she said.

He could not tell by her voice what she was feeling, thinking. Expression seemed to be withdrawn from it, perhaps deliberately.

"This summer something has come between us, a cloud has come between us. I scarcely know when I first noticed it, when it came. But I have felt it, and you have felt it."

"Yes."

"It might, perhaps, have arisen from the fact of my suspicion who Ruffo was, a suspicion that lately became a certainty. My suspicion, and latterly my knowledge, no doubt changed my manner—made me anxious, perhaps, uneasy, made me watchful, made me often seem very strange to you. That alone might have caused a difference in our relations. But I think there was something else."

"Yes, there was something else."

"And I think, I feel sure now, that it was something to do with Vere. I was, I became deeply interested in Vere—interested in a new way. She was growing up. She was passing from childhood into girlhood. She was developing swiftly.