

THE COTTAGE ON THE FELLS 5

This was the woman who had captured Hellier, heart, soul and body; and the poignant, the terrible thing in his case, was the fact that he knew his passion was partly returned, that he had awakened in this being, that chance had caused to stray across his life, that something, that magnetic response, that deep, vague interest, which in a woman's mind marks the beginning of love. That he had done this, but yet that something stood in the way.

The girl was staying at the Hotel des Bains with her aunt, Madame de Warens, a pale-faced, mild and most practicable old lady.

They had a suite of rooms, and were evidently very well-to-do people in a worldly way. They had lived at the hotel for three years, they had no relations in the visible universe, and what friendships they made were chance friendships.

Hellier had not done badly, for he had gained the confidence of old Madame de Warens, as well as the attention of her niece, and it was mainly from the old lady's rambling conversations that he had gained his knowledge of their habits and their past. Also the hint of some mysterious cloud in that past, whose shadow still hung over them, some barrier that fate had slidden between them and society, causing them to lead this aimless hotel life, divorced from friends and relations.