

The Duchess of Naxos

"Won't you come with us as far as France?"
I thanked her.

"Why won't you?"

"I think I'd be rather lonelier in France," I said lightly, "than I might be here."

"Will you be lonely?"

I did not answer.

When I glanced across the table at her again she had unpinned her hat. I waited; but she tossed it from her onto my bed.

"Why do you do that?" I asked.

"I shall not leave unless you do," she said serenely.

"That's nonsense! I am in no danger!"

"I should be, if I left you alone here."

"In what danger?"

"In danger—of falling a prey to—grief—Michael."

My heart almost stopped: she was looking down at the gloves which she was slowly stripping from her wrists:

"Danger of grief," she repeated, "of lifelong sorrow—for leaving you—here—alone. . . . Because, once, I gave my heart to you. . . ."

"You were only *Thusis*, then," I said, steadying my voice and senses with an effort.

"Am I less, now, in your eyes?" She lifted her head and looked at me.

"You are the Duchess of Naxos."