

terrace, you said, 'Take care—or I shall hate you for keeping me in the dark.' If you hated me because of what I have done, with Gaspere, Hermione, I could bear it. I could bear it, because I think it would pass away. We did keep you in the dark. Now you know it. But you know our reason, and that it was a reason of very deep affection. And I think you would forgive us, I know you would forgive us in the end. But I understand it isn't only that——"

Suddenly he thought of Vere, of that perhaps dawning folly, so utterly dead now, so utterly dead that he could no longer tell whether it had ever even sluggishly stirred with life. He thought of Vere, and of the poems, and of the secret of Pep-pina's revelation. And he wondered whether the record he seemed to read in the silence had been a true record, or whether his imagination and his intellect of a psychologist, alert even in this hour of intense emotion, had been deceiving him. Hermione had seemed to be speaking to him. But had he really been only impersonating her? Had it been really himself that had spoken to himself? As this question arose in his mind he longed to make Hermione speak. Then he could be sure of all. He must clear away all misconception. Yet, even now, how could he speak of that episode with Vere?

"You say you have always wanted gold, and that you have never been given gold——"

"Yes."

He saw the dark figure near him lift its head. And he felt that Hermione had come out of the darkness with the intention of speaking the truth of what she felt. If she could not have spoken she would have stayed in the inner chamber, or she would have escaped altogether from the palace when he moved from the doorway. He was sure that only if she spoke would she change. In her silence there was damnation for them both. But she meant to speak.

"I have been a fool. I see that now. But I think I have been suspecting it for some time—nearly all this summer."

He could hear by the sound of her voice that while she was speaking she was thinking deeply. Like him she was in search of absolute truth.

"It is only this summer that I have begun to see why people—you—have often smiled at my enthusiasms. No wonder you smiled! No wonder you laughed at me secretly!"

Her voice was hard and bitter.

"I never laughed at you, never—either secretly or openly!" he said, with a heat almost of anger.

"Oh yes, you did, as a person who can see clearly might laugh at a short-sighted person tumbling over all the little