

Once outside she breathed more freely, marshalling her unruly thoughts into something which at least approximated to order. Michael, she decided, was in straits, whirling to what? His nights—he said—were never good.

Ascending the stairs which led to her room she met Yvonne, who stopped for a word.

"Ah, my child," said she, shaking her capable forefinger, "it is time indeed you came back here. You are thin—much too thin; but I, mark you, am going to put on sound flesh."

"I saw Michael Ossory this morning and last night."

She beckoned the woman who had befriended both Michael and herself into her room.

"What is the matter with him?" she asked.

Yvonne shrugged her shoulders.

"He looks horribly unhappy. And there is something on his mind. One might help him, if one knew, if one had a hint——"

Yvonne's face became wooden. Then she said sharply: "My child, I do not meddle with what does not concern me."

"There never was a woman like you, Yvonne. All the same, tell me this, I'm not a sieve, you know: Did he ever paint a child, a girl, in what used to be the old courtyard behind this house?"

"Eh?"

Téphany repeated her question, adding: "I recognised the courtyard at once, and I should have recognised the child's face, had I ever seen it."

"What was the child like?"

Téphany began to describe it; then, foundering in a sea of vague adjectives, she clutched at a piece of paper and a pencil.

"There, there," said she, "that will give you a faint idea—eh?"

Yvonne's face softened, then it became rigid, as she returned the sketch.

"I never saw that child in my life."

"Nor in your dreams?" Téphany hazarded, remembering Michael's words.