

That development fascinated me. Of course I had always been very fond of Vere. But this summer she meant more to me than she had meant. One day—it was the day I came back to the island after my visit to Paris——"

"Yes?"

He looked at her, trying to read what she was feeling in her face, but it was too dark for him to discern it.

"Vere made a confession to me. She told me she was working secretly, that she was writing poems. I asked her to show them to me. She did so. I found some talent in them, enough for me to feel justified in telling her to continue. Once, Hermione, you consulted me. Then my advice was different."

"I know."

"The remembrance of this, and Vere's knowledge that you had suffered in not succeeding with work, prompted us to keep the matter of her attempts to write a secret for the time. It seems a trifle—all this, but looking back now, I feel that we were quite wrong in not telling you."

"I found it out."

"You knew?"

"I went to Vere's room. The poems were on the table with your corrections. I read them."

"We ought to have told you."

"I oughtn't to have read them, but I did."

"A mother has the right——"

"Not a mother who has resigned her right to question her child. I had said to Vere, 'Keep your secrets.' So I had no right, and I did wrong in reading them."

He felt that she was instinctively trying to match his sincerity with hers, and that fact helped him to continue.

"The knowledge of this budding talent of Vere's made me take a new interest in her, made me wish very much—at least I thought, I believed it was that, Hermione—that no disturbing influence should come into her life. Isidoro Panacci came—through me. Peppina came—through you. Hermione, on the night when Vere and I went out alone together in the boat Vere learnt the truth about Peppina and the life behind the shutter."

"I knew that too."

"You knew it?"

"Yes. I suspected something. You led me to suspect it."

"I remember——"

"I questioned Peppina. I made her tell me."

He said nothing for a moment. Then, with an effort, he said,