THE CONFESSIONS OF CLAUD

A ROMANCE.

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III.

Continued.

Through weeks I firmly kept my resolve. It was sometimes hard to keep, for I loved my walks with Michael, and had grown used to entering houses with him where the black sign of death met us at thresholds, and where loss would not seldom wear as much snivelling hypocrisy as real regret. Michael, too, was very keen-witted, in his way; he had a swift knowledge of his clients. He was born for his dreary calling. There was nothing unctuous or mock-sober about his approaches. He saw through shams and dealt with them by a shrewd and summary diplomacy. I remember that we once entered together a narrow little room in a German tenement-house not far away from the Bowery. We were received by a woman nearly as tall as Michael himself, who wore not a vestige of mourning, and carried an ornate gold ear-ring in either prominent ear. Her gray hair was drawn tightly backward from each temple; she was the most Dutch-looking old woman, with her big, tallowy visage, and her hirsute wart, and her small rheumy eyes, that I ever recollected having seen. She received us in a frayed wrapper and a pair of carpet slippers. She put her head a little on one side as she said:

"Vell, Mr. O'Wara, he's gone." ("He" was the late Mr. Schmitt, a grocer with whom Martha had formerly dealt). "He pass avay chuss lige a shild. I guess 'bout an hour ago. I vas vaitin' fur you ever since. I *thord* you mide be arount."

Mike nodded, and scratched one bluish cheek. He had on his best professional expression—something between a leer and a scowl. I had become perfectly familiar with it, and knew its wholly commercial nature; he put it on and off at a moment's notice, like the white cotton gloves then in his pocket. "Yes, ma'am," he now said with great sobriety. "I haird lash' night as Mr. Smith was putty low, an'—well, well, I'm sorry, ma'am, an' I guess there's manny another that'll even be sorrier nor me!"

"He vas a good man," said Mrs. Schmitt. She did not appear to be sorry. "He always gif your vife goot measure, ain't it, Mr. O'Wara?" she suddenly asked.

"Oh, shure, ma'am, yes, indeed!" declared Mike, thoroughly thrown off his guard.

Mrs. Schmitt put her head a good deal more on one side, and a sickly smile crept out at the corners of her lips. "I thord you say so, Mr. O'Wara. . . Mr. Rosenbaum vas in shuss before you come, an' ve vas a talkin' 'boud de casked."

To talk about the casket with Mr. Rosenbaum was, of course, a serious matter for Michael. Rosenbaum was a rival undertaker, an oily little Jew with a sliding scale of prices; he could be "beaten down" unmercifully, as he usually was and expected to be. Michael, on the other hand, had a set of inflexible prices for all his dismal wares and services, and held the haggling Rosenbaum in grand contempt. Still, business was business, and Rosenbaum was a German and must not be roughly spoken of here, if the present "job" was to be secured. So Michael scratched his cheek again, and cleared his throat, and said:

"Well, ma'am, an' did ye come to anny turrums wid . . the other gintleman?" He disliked to pronounce the odious name, but it must have cost him a pang to call Rosenbaum a gentleman.

"Vell," said Mrs. Schmitt, with a cough as dry as the rustle of a dead maize-stalk. "I guess I ord to teal vit Rosenbaum, Mr. O'Wara. I ord do 'cause he's a coundryman o' mine if fur no older reason. . . Still sohsoin' you'd lemme haf de casked sheaper . . say a toller or so sheaper, v. . I mide go to you. I do' vand no ice nor noddin', you unnershtand, akcen' de casked. It's cole vedder, an' I god bode de vinders up, an' a liddle sahceder always on his face, an' he'll keep firsd raie till de funerrel. So now, how mush you sharve fur shuss de casked an' vat has to be done de dav of de funerrel, an' vun carridch besides de hairss? I do efryting elss myself. Vat you sharve?"

Michael promptly told her, and received a little falsetto scream of dismay. Rosenbaum would do it nearly $6 cheaper. It at once became evident to Michael that Mrs. Schmitt had beaten Rosenbaum down just as far as she could possibly make him go, and was now using the last desperate offer of the Jew as a means of forcing his rival into a still lower offer. Young as I was, I felt this raw greed, shown at such a time, flush my cheek. Michael drew me out of the room very soon afterward. There was a look on his face wholly unprofessional and sincere. And just before he left her he told Mrs. Schmitt that if she had been a very poor woman she might have had some excuse to stand there and barter about her husband's burial-fee, but that being a woman of thrift and means, it was disgraceful in her. I forget his precise words, but they were very trenchant. He left the house at once after speaking them, and in the sort of low rumble that his lips made during the next few minutes I am afraid that I detected a good deal of hard profanity.

Still, his disgust was quite pardonable. It would have made a good many men, worlds more lettered than he, swear just as roundly. "Shure if he hadn't left her the shtore an' the bizness," he presently said, becoming coherent and perhaps a trifle apologetic to myself as well. "I—I wudn't moind a bit. But it's a heap o' money he's left her, so he has, bad luck to her fur as stingy and misserruble a wan as ever walked!"

The sadness of such glimpses as this into human life would often stay with me and haunt me. I was just at the age when we begin to think and muse, if we are dowered with fair intelligence, what sort of a planet fate has cast us upon. But Michael was not always so obdurate and unyielding to his customers. I remember going with him up several stairs to an attic in Hester street. The room which we entered contained the corpse which we had come to bury. It was sheeted, and the inevitable Romanist candles burned at its head and feet. A Mr. Lynch had died, and his relict, Mrs. Lynch, greeted us amid a family group of no less than seven children. The eldest of them were girls, who stared upon us blankly, and all of them had bare feet, gear torn and dirty, and tangled hair. There was a print of Our Lady of Seven Sorrows over the mantel. I could not help thinking, as I counted the frowzy children scattered about the room, that Mrs. Lynch was a lady with seven sorrows, too. The little girls were plaintively noisy and the little boys harshly so. One was a baby, and it had been left quite naked on the floor near a basin of water which it wished to paddle in and could not, having fallen over on its back. I recollect going to it amid the clatter and pitifully raising it up. While I did so I heard Michael's deep voice say:

"Well, Mrs. Lynch, I'll do the besht I can fur ye, an' no man can do more, d'ye undershtand, nur that, ma'am."

Mrs. Lynch was very stout. Her bosom was simply exorbitant, and over the insecure cotton stuff which clothed it towered a very coarse, red-cheeked moon of a face. She listened while Mike explained his charges.

"An' it's you, Mike O'Hara, that talks to mee loike this!" she cried, in withering reproach and anger. "It's you, is it, that knew mee family in Dundalk! Shure, w'at was your father compared to mee own, annyhow? He was a farmer, so he was, an' not loike yours, begorra, that moight 'a wurked under 'im, so ye moight! An' I sent fur ye to bury my Jerry daicent, so I did, an' not to come here wid your big prices!"

"I ain't haird about no big prices yet," said Michael, in very docile tones, scratching his cheek.

"Oh, ye ain't!" cried Mrs. Lynch, in hot satire. ("Very well! Ye may lave mee apartments, Mr. O'Hara. I knew ye well in th' ould country, an' ye can't impose upon me here. So that's all there is about it. If Jerry's to be buried in Calvary he'll be buried there daicent, ye moind, but he'd rise an' shtand roight up here among the seven child'en he's left me, so he wud, if he haird w'at ye're after ashkin' to put 'im reshpectable in his grave! . ."

"Why did you let her have a coffin at such a low price, Mike?" I said to my companion, after we had regained the street and heard no more either of Mr. Lynch's yells or those of her children. "Is it because she's Irish, like yourself?"

No, it was not because Mrs. Lynch was Irish. It was because Mike, who knew the pinch and sfab of poverty so well, had pitied the loud, aggressive widow as she did not deserve to be pitied. That was all. . . . And these episodes happened every day with us. I have narrated two salient ones, but we witnessed others, just as pathetic, just as comic.

Mike was so fond of having me for a companion that I could not understand why he now accented so resignedly the change of my indoor life. But he did accept it without a word of objection, and I naturally supposed that my mother had talked with him in private.

I began to fall in health, however, and chiefly, no doubt, from my sudden cessation of all exercise. Languid fits overcame me, and sometimes my food for days would be almost that of a bird. Afterward strong, I as yet gave no sign of my father's vigor; the physical part of me seemed mostly of maternal origin; I had my mother's large dark eyes, her sensitive outline of face, her slenderness of shape, though I promised to be tall, which she was not. I had not my mother's hair, however, for my own locks were sunny, and indeed almost as if threaded with gold. In those days I never thought of my being handsome or not. No one told me that I possessed beauty, except possibly Martha, in her most beaming moods, and even if I had become wholly assured of this fact I do not think that it would have concerned me in any serious way.

And yet I am compelled here to record (without the least impulse of vanity, but simply as a chronicler who sets down the black and white of what he states) that I was then, at the age of eleven years, a notably beautiful boy. This heritage never left me; it was my birthright, and as that it remained. In after years it became a great aid to me, as the succeeding pages of my story will show. But I think the endowment was at its best in my childhood, and perhaps because my complete ignorance of it lent it the element of unconsciousness. More than once, during my rambles beside Michael, I remember saying to him with a touch of puzzlement in my tones: "Michael, why do people look at me so hard? It seems, sometimes, as if they knew who I am, or had known me before, and wanted to speak to me."

Michael would laugh in a low, chuckling style that did not at all disarray the sombre repose of his hagyard face. But I never understood. My beauty came to me as my disposition came, from wholly explainable sources. My parents, in their different types, had been of striking personal gifts. I had inherited a combination of these. Until later there was no one to tell me the worth or even the meaning of such a legacy.

I still kept the vow made to my mother about not leaving the house unless she went with me. I often saw her eyes dwell worridly upon my face; doubtless my loss of health made me very pale. But she did not ask me to break my resolve. She comprehended that no amount of asking would make me do so. She saw that my determination sprang a great deal more from love than from fear. But at last she yielded. I did not want her to yield, but the concession came, nevertheless. I was contented enough to bide indoors. Since our talk together about my father there *had* grown within me something like a terror of going out at all. If *he* were really waiting to confront us, why not remain in retreat and obscurity until the lapse of time brought with it safety of emergence?

One day my mother said to me: "Otho, you are not well, my son. You need the air. Will you not go with Michael, as you used to do?"

I looked at her. I shook my head as I did so. "No," I replied. She understood me, and for the time held her peace. Two days later she said to me: "Otho, the weather is very fine this morning. You have studied hard of late. You have got so far in your lessons that, as you see, I am unable to follow you, or to teach you more. There is a public school only a little distance from here. I want you to go there with Michael and present yourself as a scholar."

"No, mamma," I answered, calmly and stolidly.

She put her hand on my arm. "Otho," she said, "will you go with me?"

"Yes," I at once answered. "But you must promise to walk to and from the school with me, every morning and afternoon."

"No . . . I cannot."

"Then I will not go to the school," I said.

"Otho, you are wilful and disobedient."

"I can't help it, mamma."

"But your health is not what it was."

"Yes—I know. You want me to walk abroad. I will do so, with you."

My mother heaved a low sigh. I was not wilful or disobedient in other ways, and I am sure that she gave me full credit for being neither.

"Very well," she presently said, rising, "we will take a little stroll together this morning."

I sprang toward her and threw my arms about her neck. "Mamma!" I exclaimed. "You hate to go!"

"Yes, Otho."

I drew backward. I was very stubborn in my intent; nothing could shake me. "Then you need not go," I said.

"But you force me," she responded gently.

I bit my lip. The tears had rushed to my eyes. "Oh, mamma," I cried, "you know why I will not go without you!"

A little later we left the house, side by side. We did not go to the school. It was pleasant to be abroad once more. The sun was shining; there had been a winter thaw; great drops came from the awnings of stores; enough melted snow remained in the streets to let a few sleighs pass with their merry jingles. I grew gay and garrulous before we had taken a hundred paces. It felt so pleasant to breathe the free, open air!

That afternoon I returned home with at least the semblance of an appetite. Martha watched me at supper and rapturously praised me for my renewed powers of consumption. Michael watched me, too, but he said nothing. I had my long talks with both husband and wife, just as of old, but they never presumed a word regarding my self-immurement. Of course they both had learned its cause from my mother. The next day she went out with me again. I soon grew better. My strength returned; I ate; I ceased to take tired naps at midday; my laugh rang louder and blither through the house—this little house in the Bowery, dedicated to the sale of coffins, the making of shrouds, the appurtenance and concomitance of death.

My mother was still sad. Our walks did not gladden her, though they gave new life and strength to me. For this reason she made them a daily occurrence. We always kept within the close neighborhood of the Bowery; it somehow seemed to be safer there, though the Bowery was then almost the chief New-York thoroughfare.

One evening, in my twelfth year, a most memorable event took place. We were about to seat ourselves at supper. Michael, as usual, brought in the evening paper. He always handed it to my mother. She would sometimes spend a half-hour with its contents while Martha busied herself preparing our meal.

But on the especial evening to which I refer my mother suddenly dropped the paper three or four minutes after it had been handed to her, and uttered a sharp, bitter cry as she did so.

We all hurried to her side. For some time she was quite speechless. She could tell us nothing; she could only stare at us with glazed eyes. But at length she pointed downward at the journal which she had been reading. I ran my gaze along its columns. On a sudden a very familiar name arrested it. That was the name of my father, Leopold Clauss.

Yes, there it was, in large type, glaring at me. And what words accompanied it? Heavens! had I lost my senses? Had my mother's agitation alarmed me out of my reason? No, the printed lines were too clear for that. It must be true. I looked up at my mother. Her face was very white, but no whiter, I fancy, than my own. If ever two human creatures exchanged a glance of silent terror we did so then. But it was not a selfish terror. I knew that her heart could not feel a selfish thrill if it had tried; and with me the thought of her dire peril had leaped horrifyingly uppermost. Martha, seeing the pallor and distress of our faces, broke into a frightened wail. The next minute Michael had taken me in his strong arms, with a tenderness exquisite for so rough a creature.

"Whist, Mashter Otho," he said. "Luk at me an' tell me w'at it is ye seen in the paper . . . Mashter Otho!" (for I could not heed him, I could not keep my eyes off my mother's hueless face). "Mashter Otho, I say! It's Mike that's ashkin' ye, dear little wan! Luk at me an' tell me!"

But here my mother found a voice, though it was quite weak and husky. "There—there is something in the paper about my husband," she said. "He has attempted a murder."

"A murder!" echoed Martha, with a little scream. Poor Martha drowsed into a chair and covered her face. Then, in her misery at my mother's misery, the ruling passion asserted itself, and she began to assail her husband with reproaches.

"W'y didn't ye have more common sense, man, than to let Missus Clorz see the paper at all until you'd skhimmed it over yerself? That's jusht you, Mike O'Hara, through the wurld! Anny other man wud . . ."

But my mother stopped this absurd torrent of rebuke by a wave of the hand. She was fast growing herself again. She pointed once more to the paper. "Read, Michael," she said. "And be silent, Martha. How can you blame your good husband? What will you not blame him for, soon? . . Read, Michael—I cannot, yet."

Michael presently did read. He made a grotesque herald of the sinister tidings which my mother and I now waited to hear in full. Some of his pronunciations might have hinted striking novelties to an eccentric verbalist. He floundered, he stumbled, he treated certain words as if they were hurdles, and indeed a few of them wholly unset him. But the terrible truth stealing upon us through this medium of the quaint and the ludicrous, perhaps took a new irony and sting. What he read, put into other language, was this:

My father, on the previous evening, just at dusk, had suddenly attacked a lady named Dorian, as she was leaving the stoop of her residence in Lafayette Place, and about to enter a carriage. His appearance at the time was excited and dishevelled; he looked like a man under mental aberration, though he bore no signs of being intoxicated. Mrs. Dorian—well-known as the widow of a wealthy New-York merchant—was of course quite unprepared for the attack, and uttered a cry as Clauss drew a small, sharp knife upon her. In another minute he would have inflicted a wound, had not a passer-by of powerful frame and quick courage (his name was of course given, but it has long ago escaped my memory) dashed up to the would-be murderer and seized his wrist with both hands. Instead, however, of a struggle ensuing between the two men, Clauss had abruptly dropped his knife and showed great docility. For, as the lady rushed back toward her dwelling, he had seen her face in a new light, and discovered that she was not the person whom he had at first believed her. He attempted no flight, and police-aid being near at hand, he was at once taken into custody. On arrest he refused to give his name, but merely muttered, in a gloomy way and with a strong foreign accent, that he had mistaken the lady for his wife, who had deserted him, and that he was sorry for having been misled by a strange resemblance. He also declared that it had been for several months his intention to kill his wife if he ever met her, and that he had constantly gone armed for this purpose. He had been committed promptly for breach of peace, and had afterward still refused to give his name. His person having been searched, however, several letters were found upon it addressed to Leopold Clauss. He had subsequently admitted this name to be his own. The prisoner's general appearance and his great physical vigor were here described. Several by-standers, at the time of this singular occurrence, had expressed the opinion that he was insane. But although in a state of severe mental turmoil, his sanity was hardly to be doubted. In any case he was certainly an individual to be placed under restraint. The address on his letters had been that of an inferior boarding-house in a street near the lower portion of the Bowery. Inquiries concerning him had been made here, and although his sober habits were admitted by his landlady, she stated that he was much in her debt and that his morose and odd behavior had for some time made her anxious to be rid of him. She knew, however, nothing of his antecedents. A report had become current that Mrs. Dorian, the lady whom he had so curiously attacked under the conviction that she was another person, had recently changed affright for interest, and was very desirous of investigating the whole remarkable case. Mrs. Dorian was confident of never having seen Clauss before. She was a French lady, who had lived in New-York since her marriage, about twelve years ago, to the late Mr. Charles A. Dorian, formerly a prosperous importer of foreign silks. It was rumored that Mrs. Dorian, both through curiosity and a certain misplaced pity, had resolved to visit Clauss in his confinement and hold an interview with him. And there the newspaper article ended.

I shall never forget that night. My room adjoined my mother's, and I sat beside her bed till dawn, holding her hand. I knew well enough that neither Michael nor Martha slept in any but the most fitful way, for I could constantly hear their voices across the hall. Still, they did not disturb us. They left us alone with our grief and our fear.

If I had not been so sure that my mother still loved this wretched man I should perhaps have suffered less than I did. But I was certain that such indestructible love all the time gave a fresh pang to her agony. My counsel, as we remained there, side by side, was of one sort. We must fly from the city. Never mind if they sent my father to prison for weeks or for months. Let us leave New-York. Let us go where he could never find us. Some day they would set him free again, and then he would watch and wait, just as he must have done before.

But my mother shook her head. She did not at first explain to me her reason for doing so, perhaps she could not yet explain. Her brain was still throbbing and whirling; her nerves were still tingling. Late that night, however, she said to me, lying there at my side in the stillness and shadow of the room:

"No, Otho. It can not be. I will not take help from Michael and Martha, and that is what we should have to do if we went elsewhere. They are themselves poor enough . . as you know. I have gained a little place for myself here; it lets you and me live; it is not much, perhaps, but it does that. We have a home, Otho—a *coin du feu*. Michael and Martha are far more like servants to us both than I wish them to be. I should like to live with them always; I love them, and so do you. And then it is so pleasant for me to remember, Otho, that if anything should befall me, they would be near you, almost ready to die for you. I never saw anything like the love you have insuled in them. I wonder if it will always be thus with you—if you will always win hearts as easily as that. If you do you will be one of God's most rarely gifted creatures, since there is nothing so precious as to have the power of making ourselves beloved at will—though, alas! there is deadly danger in the gift, too! . . But we will speak of that hereafter, mon cheri; we will speak now of going away. It would be folly. The more that I think of it the more I feel it. It would be to change welfare for poverty, solvency for debt, peace for struggle. Besides, in a large city there is, after all, the least risk of his finding us. Here one escapes in the crowd, as it might be said. And then, Otho . . there is always my trust in the bon Dieu. I am not a good Catholic, as you know; there was never anything of the *devote* about me; but I have faith in God's goodness, and I do not believe He thinks me sinful enough to let your father . . Well my son, you understand what I would say. It is all most terrible. It will haunt me for weeks. I feel as if some part of me had been dipped in blood, and I could not rub off the stain. But he is your father—never forget that, Otho!"

"And you love him still, mamma," I said to her, under my breath. "Even though he has tried to kill another woman, thinking she was you, you still love him!"

I saw her breast quiver and her lips tighten as she lay there at my side. "Otho," she said, "it has been dreadful for you to remain up like this. To-morrow you will be ill. Go at once to bed, my son. Do as mamma bids."

"You love him still," I persisted, with no questioning in my tones, but rather a sad accusation there.

She did not answer me. It was true. A sudden passionate feeling swept through me. I had never known it before, and I did not recognize it then. But it was jealousy, pure and simple. It was jealousy of this love which no outrage could weaken, no villany lessen. I clenched my hands as I slipped out of the room. A little later I lay in my own bed, beset by a lurid mood which I strove to control without avail. There seemed to me a cause for burning resentment in my mother's unalterable affection. I felt as if the fresh insight I had gained into that ideal wifely constancy were a wrong, a jeer and a slur to my own filial love. But the mood at length died away in a troubled sleep, and the sleep was followed by a dolorous awakening of headache and fever. A severe illness ensued, and I lay for a fortnight prostrated by one of those fits of nervous exhaustion which to a boy of my frail health might easily have meant death. Need I tell, at this stage of these confessions, whose care and devotion helped me to live? But she was not my only nurse. Four other eyes watched me besides her two dark, patient ones. I remember waking from a sleep full of delirious dreams, on a certain afternoon. I have a fancy that it somehow must have been afternoon, and crying out wild words in French—words like these: "*C'est papa! Prends garde, maman! Il veut te tuer! Il a un couteau—un grand couteau! Il'epeches-toi!*"

And then an arm of iron, except that it was gentle as any girl's, slid under my hot form, and I was drawn so close to a broad, hard breast that one or two of the bristles of Mike's beard grazed my cheek. And I was not startled, though I expected my mother; she had always been near me hitherto when I had had these unhappy seizures. But Michael did just as well, that day. The tears rush to my eyes now as I think of how that man had grown to worship me. I never gave him half nor a third of the love he gave to me. I never gave it to Martha, who would (I verily believe so!) have laid down her life to preserve mine. I never gave it—yes, let me write the plain words where I wish all to be plain and unsparing—I never gave it to the mother whose passion for me was an absolute sanctity. I have never really known what it is to love—except once. I have been capable of a great fondness in more than a single case. But it seems to have been my fate, my doom, that others should care for me better than I cared for them. I did not realize all this till long afterward. I thought that I loved my mother just as well as she loved me, but I now see, looking back through the solemn vista of experience, just how wrong I was! . . What has it always been? Has it been my beauty, which grew as I grew and stared me in the face like a challenge to vanity? Has it been a trick of smile, an unconscious mode of speech, an inherent mannerism of charm? I cannot say. I only know that I could win without choosing or caring to win, when the years made me older, and that then, in my boyhood, a sense of this power had begun to dawn upon me. God knows that there is no vainglory in these words I now write! Sooner or later they must have been written in the pages whose record means the laying bare of a life, the exposition of a soul! . . .

My illness lasted a fortnight, as I have stated. But with all these grisly facilities at its hand, as one might say, death did not claim me, there in Michael's abode of undertaking. If I had died I suppose they would have called it cerebral congestion. I wonder how poor Mike and Martha, in that event, would have told their friends with what malady I had passed away. Ah, no! they would neither of them, good souls, have been able to pronounce the big Latinity of the words. Their tears would have choked them even more than their ignorance!

My convalescence was rapid, considering my dire peril. But it is thus in nearly all functional disturbances of the brain. Less than another fortnight left me comparatively well, though still weak and nervous.

I soon questioned my mother about the event which had so sharply preceded my ailment. Where was my father now? What had happened since I last heard of him? What tidings had the newspapers given us?

My father had been sent to prison. It was not to be a long incarceration. His assault might have been a crime, but the law judged from results, not intentions. An effort had been made to find the wife because of whom he had planned his vile deed, but without success.

I shuddered as I heard this last meaning detail.

IV.

When I was strong enough to leave the house I went out hand in hand with Michael, as formerly. I had forgotten—or I chose to forget—the vow made to my mother in former days. But my walks with dear old Mike were much briefer now than they had once been. Sometimes I would have to return with my arm hanging wearily on his, though each day made me stronger.

My mother had meanwhile greatly altered. She had not, like myself, fallen prostrate under the shock of that hideous news, but it had laid upon her, none the less, a few signal traces. She had grown thinner, and the liquid darkness of her beautiful eyes held a more wistful gleam. At times it seemed as if the terror had never quite left her face—as if through the rest of her life she would always be expecting, dreading some new calamitous thing. A slight sound would make her start; a sudden current of air would cause her to shiver, or to bend like a blown reed. He whom she still so stubbornly loved was now an image clad in fear, almost in the red garb of crime. And I am sure that this shape never quitted her mental vision—that it was stamped there as indelibly as if it had been a scar on her flesh. She saw my father in all phases of inward agony. She realized what he suffered and why he suffered it. She pitied him and longed to help him. Meanwhile, she could do nothing. Nothing but hide from him! It is not a pleasure to love in that way. I think one might truly call it an anguish.

I had noticed for several days certain signs in my mother's demeanor toward me which seemed to indicate either that she was hiding something from me which it hurt her conscience to hide, or that she was dubious about telling me something which she was by no means convinced that I ought to hear. When we incessantly see and associate with only three or four people it is marvellous how swift is our note of the least change in them.

"Is there something you want to tell me?" I said to my mother, at last.

She started. Then she smiled her melancholy smile. "I knew you were an enchanter, Otho," she said, "and I forgot that enchanters and wizards are one. Yes," she went on, hesitatingly, "there is something I want to tell you. Otho, it concerns . . your father."

I was not surprised to hear this. Whom else could it concern? "Well," I questioned. "What is it?"

My mother put her arm about my neck and drew me to her bosom. "Otho, that lady, you know—the one he attacked. I want so much to see her—to speak with her. The desire to do both torments me. I might have gone to her alone. But I will not go without you. Will you go with me, Otho?"

"Why do you wish to see her, mamma?" I asked. I put this question mechanically. I knew why, quite well.

"It is hard to answer you," she said, hesitatingly. "My chief reason is . . ."

"The love you still feel for him," I broke in. But I did not speak reproachfully. I was recalling her recent devotion through my illness. "It is wrong," I continued softly, "you know it is wrong. It is giving a clew."

"A clew?" she said. "How? He is in prison now. Why should she tell him anything? I have heard about her; she is well known; she is a lady of prominence here. She gives large sums to St. Stephen's Church, not far away. There could be no possible danger."

"Very well," I said, after a pause, "I will go with you."

She kissed me twice or thrice, almost passionately. "We will go to-day," she said.

We went that afternoon. I disapproved the plan, but my heart was so full of gratitude, just then, that to refuse her what I knew her whole soul was set upon doing seemed almost sacrilegious.

We easily found Mrs. Dorian's house. It was smart-looking, with polished window-panes and fresh-painted trellises on stoop and balcony. Lafayette Place was then a quarter of distinction; even now its breadth has more dignity than that of most New-York streets, and then the comparatively even heights of its buildings missed that ugly irregularity which we notice with regret in Fifth or Madison Avenues. A maid-servant, tidily garbed, admitted us. We were shown without delay into such a drawing-room as few of the wealthy magnates now possess. Its doors were of heavy, panelled mahogany that shone like glass. Its furniture was of hair-cloth, and its mirrors rose from the rather sombrely carpeted floor to the plain white ceiling, with no frames except a slim, beaded verge of gilt. It would strike me to-day, no doubt, as very bare and dull; but years had to elapse before Queen Anne structures would rise in the region of Central Park, modish with tiled mantels and effective wainscots, and I then thought it all quite elegant and imposing. My mother had spoken a few words to the servant which were both too low and too quick for my hearing. I suppose they were simply a brief expression of her strong desire to see Mrs. Dorian.

And very soon Mrs. Dorian appeared. The instant she did so I detected her striking resemblance to my mother. She was a trifle taller, however, and carried herself with a much more assertive air. And yet if you regarded her with any degree of scrutiny you discovered that this likeness was altogether superficial. The eyes were brighter, but smaller; the cut of the features bore no real similarity; yet the general contour of both face and figure, as also the prevalent tints of coloring, were oddly in accord with those which had made her the object of so dire a mistake.

The moment that Mrs. Dorian began to speak I found myself forgetting that any resemblance whatever existed. Her voice was high, and with a ring in it like that of a sweet bell. In speaking, she threw back her head a little, and disposed herself with what is called an air. But she revealed no touch of arrogance. It was not an unpleasant transformation. It cut a gulf of difference between my mother and herself, but it developed the sense of a fresh and new personality.

"You said that you wanted to see me about some important matter," she began, using English that promptly betrayed a slight foreign accent. She remained standing while she thus spoke, and of course addressed my mother, who had risen on her entrance. She was attired in flowing silks of more than one shade, that were somewhat odd in make but extremely tasteful.

"I did wish very much to see you," answered my mother, in tones that made clear her keen excitement. "And for this reason I must lose no time in telling you just who I am. I—"

But here Mrs. Dorian went quickly nearer to her, giving a sharp exclamation. Her eyes had widened with evident astonishment. "You—you are the image of myself!" she broke forth. "Good Heavens! perhaps you are *she!* Perhaps—yes, you must be *his* wife!"

My mother smiled. There was a pained relief in the smile; she had been spared a disclosure deplored though sought. "I am the wife of Leopold Clauss," she said, using her own language as if unconsciously. And the next instant she dropped into a chair, weak and unstrung.

Mrs. Dorian at once took a seat at her side. She peered with eager scrutiny into my mother's face. Her next words were also in French, and so fleet that they seemed to leap from her lips.

"You are she, then! I have thought of you so often! That terrible affair had, after all, such a romantic touch! And I love all things that are quaint and extraordinary. Our resemblance is both. I am very glad you came to me. Of course you dreaded to come . . It is wonderful how we look alike. I have always doubted if until now. And yet we are so different—I perceive this in a moment; it is easy to perceive. . . Ah, that dreadful matter was such a shock to me! I was ill for days because of it. My friends said I was foolish to do what I did. My friends are always saying that I am foolish to do what I do. By 'friends' I mean the people who carp and rail at one for nothing. I have no friends. I have only one friend, that is; I mean myself, and she is also quite often my enemy. But do you know what I did? I went to see your husband. I visited him in his cell."

"You saw him?" faltered my mother.

"Yes. I felt like someone in a novel by Balzac. It was so delightful to feel like someone in a novel by Balzac. I mean the great Frenchman—our countryman—who wrote those superb tales that seem to be alive while you read them; the printed lines are to me like little veins with real blood running red through each of them."

"I do not understand," my mother murmured. She did not know of Balzac, or at best he was a mere name to her.

Mrs. Dorian gave a light, soft laugh that had no jar in it; pity alone seemed to dwell there. "I know, I know, my poor woman," she said, laying a hand on my mother's arm. "You do not understand, and you want to hear of your husband, who in turn wanted to kill you. You need not tell me that you still care for him. I knew it some minutes ago. I think, truly, that I have known it for months. He is a monster of jealousy; he is also a madman; but he is a wonderfully fascinating monster and madman. He has the shape and face of an old Norse god. He received me with a scowl, but it was such a magnificent scowl. There was a strong light; it was midday, you know. He saw plainly enough that I was not you. I did not go into the cell alone, of course. But if I had gone alone there would have been no danger. He simply did not wish me there, and that was all. He would tell me nothing; he sat staring at the floor, and he answered all my questions in monosyllables. I could get no satisfaction from him—none whatever. He would not speak of you; he would not even speak of himself. He grumbled a sort of apology to me for having wanted to murder me. It was immensely interesting; it was what I should call a thrilling experience; and one gets so few thrilling experiences in a huge overgrown village like this New-York, where I am forced to live for horrid commercial reasons that concern my poor dead husband's business. But in spite of his surly treatment I went away from him with a kind of glow. I had been brought face to face with raw, naked human nature. And I insisted on forming my own conclusions, though people laughed at me in their superior wisdom. I insisted that his jealousy—which was like something fresh from the Middle Ages, with all the coarse, bloodthirsty color of that period—had for its object some true, kind little woman who had loved him and never wronged him. And now I have only to look at you and feel certain I was right. You see, I am constantly judging, concluding, from impulse and instinct. Anyone who does that is always held to be more or less insane. I am not at all insane, and I did it in this instance, and am convinced that I formed a correct opinion. You do care for him still, though he has treated you infamously. I can understand it; I have only to look at you well in order to understand it. I have seen him, and it is all clear to me. Englishwomen, American women, are often clever, but they have neither the depth nor breadth of a clever Frenchwoman. We do not merely see through things; we possess imagination, which is an enormous help to reason."

Mrs. Dorian and my mother spoke on together for a good hour. Or perhaps I should state that only Mrs. Dorian spoke, for the pauses were rare in her buoyant, rattling monologue. During these she would listen, but my mother had, after all, little to communicate. She had come but for one purpose, and this had failed. She had hoped to find out more concerning my father, his present frame of mind, his health, even his baleful grudge against herself. But Mrs. Dorian could tell her nothing, except that he had looked very handsome and treated her with great sullenness. Two women were never more mentally unlike than my mother and this lady. One was all gravity and stability, the other all volatile flightiness. Mrs. Dorian was a kind of intellectual Proteus, in fact—as I remember years afterward calling her. To meet her every day for a month was to discover that she had received at least thirty distinct sets of impressions. She afterward would often make me think of her as of a person who has come into our planet on an exploring expedition—who has been given just so much time to look about and no more, and who is determined to do as much observing, thinking and feeling as may be possible within the allotted sojourn. But though a weather-vane of change in many ways, this woman had much fixity of principle, of conduct, of moral ideal. She enjoyed life, on the other hand, because she got a great deal out of it; what made her not enjoy it thoroughly was because she could not get as much out of it as she wanted to get. Her receptivity was greater than the resources of her environment. She adored Paris, where she had been born, and undoubtedly its brilliance and its activity would at all times have made her most fitting world. She had read everything, and was constantly having some new literary idol, whom she would soon desert for one still newer. With the exception of Balzac (whose multiformity and versatility seemed in letters a semblance of what she herself was in life) she was always forgetting the worship of to-day for that of to-morrow. The great French novelist, romancer and poet held a secure niche in her memory, her affection. Others came and went; he stayed.

It was natural enough that one of such a temperament as this should confuse and weary my simple-minded mother. But Mrs. Dorian interested me sharply, young as I then was, though of course there was much of what she said that I failed wholly to understand. Indeed, the words which I have already put into her mouth must not be taken as literal or authentic. They are both only so far as my childish memory may be trusted, and a failure to catch the sense of more than one brisk sentence as it then left her, has compelled its omission from among those which maturer powers help me to recall.

Her notice of myself was like a sudden discovery. Her eyes lighted upon me as if by chance, and a little cry followed. She hurried toward me and drew me back to where she had been seated. "And this is your child!" she exclaimed to my mother. "How beautiful he is! He is you, and yet he is his father as well. Those great dark eyes, with the curving lashes, are yours, and certain delicate lines of the face, too. But the blond hair, and the nose, the mouth—these his handsome father gave him. Oh, what an enchanting boy!" Here she kissed my cheek many times; there was a perfume like lavender about the soft silks of her attire that made it a pleasure to be near them. "How stupid of me not to have noticed him before! I love children, always; they are dwellers in a world that we may never enter, no matter how closely we clasp them to our hearts. But when they are so lovely as this boy of yours their world seems like a garden in some other star. . . But I must not flatter you, *mon petit*. Your beauty will be so much the sweeter while you do not think about it. . . ." And now Mrs. Dorian drew out a tiny watch from her belt; I remember how it caught my eye at-once; it was oddly enamelled, and quaint, like everything she wore. "Bah!" she exclaimed, "I have to meet some dreadful commercial creatures in ten minutes; I fear my carriage has already arrived. When shall I be freed from the necessity of talking about what I do not at all comprehend with persons who try to make me suppose that they do not perceive my own stupidity and *ennui?* That is it—I am stupid because I am so *ennuyée*. You see, my dear Madame Clauss, my husband died and left me a great responsibility. Every one knows the house of Dorian & Company, importers of silks. But the 'Company' is a mere sham. Now that my husband is gone, I represent him, solely and absolutely. At first I wanted to stop the business. My friends shrieked at me with disgust: 'What! stop a superb business like that? Close up a channel through which precious wealth flows to the nation! It would be unpardonable.' Then I wanted to sell the whole enormous affair, patronage, connections, name, everything, as one would sell a horse or a threshing-machine. Again my friends shrieked at me, after every offer which I received: 'What! sell so splendid a business for a mere song like that?' *Ma foi!* I could do nothing for weeks except wonder what I ought to do. Meanwhile my friends shrieked: 'Get some man whom you can trust, and place the whole affair under his control at a handsome salary.' But this made me weep with vexation one minute and laugh with amusement the next. Some man whom I could trust, indeed! I have always made it a point to trust everybody whom I know nothing at all against. It is to me so dreadful for one not to do that! And as for selecting any particular person in whom to repose my faith, that seemed none the less venturesome and experimental. But in a little while I woke to the fact that I had been trusting, ever since I was a widow, an old confidential clerk of my husband's, a creature as juiceless as a hickory-nut, all wrinkles and rheumatism and discretion. His name was Grodge, and after a long interview with him I resolved upon the perpetration of a tremendous deception, a huge hypocrisy. Grodge was my tempter, and I yielded. The world to-day believes that I carry on, with consummate cleverness, the great business of Dorian & Co. But Grodge is at once my mask of guile and my staff of support. If he should die, the mask would fall, and the staff would crack. I should be exposed as a lamentable fraud. As it is, I have only to look wise, to glance over accounts in the presence of other semi-superiors, and to cough with dignity. It is astonishing with what dignity I have learned how to cough. I have somehow got an idea that it is this cough, and nothing else, which saves me from having my reputation ignominiously shattered as a woman of great mercantile shrewdness. I think that I learned the cough from Grodge; he has one a good deal like it. He alone possesses the secret of my gross incapacity. But he is an accomplice not to be corrupted. I glance over accounts which seem to me a chaos of figures. I nod; I cough; I make believe that I am adding them up and confirming the result. *En effet*, I detest figures, and he multiplication-table has always been to me an enigma. I have a conviction that Œdipus asked the Sphinx how much was nine-times-nine or eleven-times-eleven, and that for this