

## CHAPTER VI

### AN INDISCRETION

HAPPILY we need not enter into details. The method and manner of the affair are quite secondary. We can draw a veil directly the latch-key of Miss Gaby Greuze clicks against the latch of Miss Gaby Greuze's sumptuous flat, and it need not be withdrawn again until Mr. Parham re-emerges from that same flat looking as respectable as a suburban embezzler going to church. As respectable? Except for a certain glory. An exaltation. Such as no mere thief of money ever knew.

Fragments of a conversation follow, a conversation it is undesirable to locate.

"I've always liked you since first we met," said Gaby. . . .

"It was a sort of promise." . . .

"How quick you were to understand. You *are* quick! I see you watching people—summing them up." . . .

"It must be wonderful to know all you know," said Gaby, "and think all you think. You make me feel—so shallow!"

"What need have *you* for the helm of Athene?" Mr. Parham exclaimed.

"Well, a woman likes to feel at the helm now and then," said Gaby, with her usual infelicity

## THE AUTOCRACY OF MR. PARHAM

of apprehension, and for a time she seemed moody.

But she said Mr. Parham was very beautifully made. His smile when she said it lit the flat. And so strong. Did he take much exercise? Tennis. She would play tennis if she wasn't afraid of muscles in the wrong place. Exercise, she said, was ever so much better than taking exercises except for that. Of course, there *were* exercises one took. Some that made one supple and were good for one's carriage and figure. Had Mr. Parham ever seen her sort of exercises? Well . . .

They were lovely exercises.

She patted his cheek and said, "Nice man!" She said that several times.

And she said, "You are what I should call simple."

"Delicate," she added, noting a question in his face, "but not complex."

She said this with a distant, pensive look in her eyes. She was admiring the sheen on her beautiful arm and wrist, and then she said, "And when one is being as lovely as one can be to you, whatever else you do or say, anyhow, you don't say 'Gaw!'"

She compressed her lips and nodded. "Gaw!" she repeated; "as though he had found you out in something that not for a minute you had ever felt or intended.

"Making you feel—like some insect."

She began to weep unrestrainedly, and suddenly she threw herself once more into Mr. Parham's arms.

#### AN INDISCRETION,

Poor, poor little woman, sensitive, ardent, generous, and so misunderstood! . . .

When Mr. Parham met the unsuspecting Sir Bussy again after this adventure a great pride and elation filled him. Touched with a not unpleasant remorse. He had to put an extra restraint upon his disposition towards condescension. But afterwards he found Sir Bussy looking at him curiously, and feelings of a less agreeable kind, a faint apprehension, mingled with his glory.

When Mr. Parham encountered Gaby Greuze once more, and it is notable how difficult it became to meet her again except in the most transitory way, this glory of his glowed with a passionate warmth that called for the utmost self-control. But always a man of honour respects a modest woman's innate craving for secrecy. Not even the roses in her bosom must suspect. She was evasive; she wished to be evasive. Delicately and subtly Mr. Parham came to realize that for him and his fellow-sinner it was best that it should be as if this bright, delicious outbreak of passion had never occurred.

Nevertheless, there it was; he was one up on Sir Bussy.