

The Stepmother, A Drama in Five Acts eBook

The Stepmother, A Drama in Five Acts by Honoré de Balzac

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Contents

The Stepmother, A Drama in Five Acts eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	5
Page 1.....	6
Page 2.....	8
Page 3.....	11
Page 4.....	14
Page 5.....	16
Page 6.....	19
Page 7.....	21
Page 8.....	23
Page 9.....	26
Page 10.....	28
Page 11.....	30
Page 12.....	32
Page 13.....	34
Page 14.....	37
Page 15.....	39
Page 16.....	41
Page 17.....	43
Page 18.....	45
Page 19.....	48
Page 20.....	50
Page 21.....	52
Page 22.....	54

Page 23.....	56
Page 24.....	58
Page 25.....	60
Page 26.....	62
Page 27.....	64
Page 28.....	67
Page 29.....	70
Page 30.....	73
Page 31.....	75
Page 32.....	77
Page 33.....	80
Page 34.....	82
Page 35.....	84
Page 36.....	86
Page 37.....	88
Page 38.....	91
Page 39.....	94
Page 40.....	97
Page 41.....	100
Page 42.....	102
Page 43.....	105
Page 44.....	107
Page 45.....	109
Page 46.....	111
Page 47.....	113
Page 48.....	115

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	
Section	Page
Start of eBook	1
(Stage setting remains as in Act I.)	1
	2
(Scene curtain.)	11
(Scene curtain.)	13
(Same stage-setting. Morning.)	14
(Pauline's chamber.)	31
(The chamber of Pauline as before.)	40
(Scene curtain.)	43

Page 1

(Stage setting remains as in Act I.)

Ramel and Marguerite; later, Felix.

(Ramel is buried in his reflections, reclining on the sofa in such a way as to be almost out of sight. Marguerite brings in lights and cards. Night is approaching.)

Marguerite Four card tables—that will be enough, even though the cure, the mayor and his assistant come. (Felix lights the candles.) I'll wager anything that my poor Pauline will not be married this time. Dear child! If her late mother were to see that she was not queen of the house, she would weep in her coffin! I only remain here in order to comfort and to wait upon her.

Felix (aside) What is this old woman grumbling about? (Aloud) Whom are you complaining of now, Marguerite? I'll bet it is the mistress.

Marguerite
No, it is not; I am blaming the master.

Felix
The General? You had better mind your own business. He is a saint, is that man.

Marguerite
Yes, a stone saint, for he is blind.

Felix
You had better say that he has been blinded.

Marguerite
You hit the nail on the head there.

Felix
The General has but one fault—he is jealous.

Marguerite
Yes, and obstinate, too.

Felix Yes, obstinate; it is the same thing. When once he suspects anything he comes down like a hammer. That was the way he laid two men lifeless at a blow. Between ourselves, there is only one way to treat a trooper of that sort; you must stuff him with flattery. And the mistress certainly does stuff him. Besides, she is clever enough to put blinders on him, such as they put on shying horses; he can see neither to the right nor to the left, and she says to him, "My dear, look straight ahead!" So she does!



Marguerite

Ah! You think with me that a woman of thirty-two does not love a man of seventy without some object. She is scheming something.

Ramel (aside)

Oh, these servants! whom we pay to spy over us!

Felix

What can be her scheme? She never leaves the house, she never sees anyone.

Marguerite She would skin a flint! She has taken away the keys from me—from me who always had the confidence of the former mistress; do you know why she did so?

Felix

I suppose she is saving up her pile.

Marguerite Yes, out of the fortune of *Mlle.* Pauline, and the profits of the factory. That is the reason why she puts off the marriage of the dear child as long as she can, for she has to give up her fortune when she marries her.

Felix

Yes, that's the law.

Marguerite I would forgive her everything, if only she made Mademoiselle happy; but I sometimes catch my pet in tears, and I ask her what is the matter, and she says nothing but "Good Marguerite!" (Exit Felix.) Let me see, have I done everything? Yes, here are the card tables—the candles—the cards—Ah! the sofa. (She catches sight of Ramel) Good Lord! A stranger!



Page 2

Ramel
Don't be startled, Marguerite.

Marguerite
You must have heard all we said.

Ramel
Don't be alarmed. My business is to keep secrets. I am the state's attorney.

Marguerite
Oh!

Sceneseccond

The same persons, Pauline, Godard, Vernon, Napoleon, Ferdinand, the General, Madame de Grandchamp.

(Gertrude rushes to Marguerite and snatches the cushions from her hands.)

Gertrude Marguerite, you know very well what pain you give me, by not allowing me to do everything for your master; besides, I am the only one who knows how to arrange the cushions to his liking.

Marguerite (to Pauline)
What a to-do about nothing!

Godard
Why, look! Here is the state's attorney!

The General
The state's attorney at my house?

Gertrude
I am surprised!

The General (to Ramel)
Sir, what brings you here?

Ramel
I asked my friend, M. Ferdinand Mar—

(Ferdinand checks him by a gesture. Gertrude and Pauline look at him in alarm.)



Gertrude (aside)

It is his friend, Eugene Ramel.

Ramel

My friend, Ferdinand de Charny, to whom I have told the object of my visit, to say nothing about it until you had finished your dinner.

The General

Ferdinand then is your friend?

Ramel I have known him from childhood; and here we met in your avenue. On meeting, after nine years of separation, we had so many things to talk about, that I caused him to be late.

The General

But, sir, to what circumstance am I to attribute your presence here?

Ramel

I come in the matter of Jean Nicot, known as Champagne, your foreman, who is charged with a crime.

Gertrude

But, sir, our friend, Doctor Vernon, has declared that Champagne's wife died a natural death.

Vernon

Yes, sir, cholera.

Ramel

Justice, sir, believes in nothing but investigations and convictions of its own. You did wrong to proceed before my arrival.

Felix

Madame, shall I bring in the coffee?

Gertrude

Wait a while! (Aside) How changed this man is, this attorney. I shouldn't have recognized him. He terrifies me.

The General

But how could you be brought here by the crime of Champagne, an old soldier for whom I would stand security?

Ramel

You will earn that, on the arrival of the investigating magistrate.

The General

Will you be pleased to take a seat?



Ferdinand (to Ramel, pointing out Pauline)
That is she!

Ramel
A man might lay down his life for such a lovely girl.

Gertrude (to Ramel)
We do not know each other! You have never seen me, have you? You must
have pity on us!

Ramel
You may depend upon me for that.



Page 3

The General (who sees Ramel and Gertrude talking together)
Is my wife to be called to this investigation?

Ramel
Certainly, General. I came here myself because the countess had not been notified that we required her presence.

The General
My wife mixed up in such an affair? It is an outrage!

Vernon
Keep cool, my friend.

Felix (announcing)
Monsieur, the investigating magistrate!

The General
Let him come in.

Scenethird

The same persons, the investigating magistrate, Champagne, Baudrillon and a gendarme who is guarding Champagne.

The Magistrate (bowing to the company)
Monsieur the state's attorney, this is M. Baudrillon, the druggist.

Ramel
Has M. Baudrillon seen the accused?

The Magistrate
No, monsieur, the accused came in charge of a gendarme.

Ramel
We shall soon learn the truth in this case! Let M. Baudrillon and the accused approach.

The Magistrate
Come forward, M. Baudrillon; (to Champagne) and you also.

Ramel
M. Baudrillon, do you identify this man as the person who bought arsenic from you two days ago?



Baudrillon

Yes, that is the very man.

Champagne

Didn't I tell you, M. Baudrillon, that it was for the mice that were eating up everything, even in the house, and that I wanted it for Madame?

The Magistrate Do you hear him, madame? This is his plea; he pretends that you yourself sent him to get this stuff, and that he handed the package to you just as he took it from M. Baudrillon.

Gertrude

It is true, sir.

Ramel

Did you make any use of the arsenic, madame?

Gertrude

No, sir.

The Magistrate You can then show us the package sent by M. Baudrillon; it should have his label, and if he acknowledges that it is entire and unbroken, the serious charges made against your foreman will in part be disproved. We shall then have nothing more to do than to receive the report of the physician who held the autopsy.

Gertrude

The package, sir, has never been taken from the desk in my bedroom.
(Exit.)

Champagne

Ah! General, I am saved.

The General

Poor old Champagne!

Ramel General, we shall be very happy if we have to announce the innocence of your foreman; unlike you soldiers, we are always delighted to be beaten.

Gertrude (returning)

Here it is, gentlemen.

(The Magistrate, Baudrillon and Ramel examine the package.)

Baudrillon (putting on his glasses)

It is intact, gentlemen, perfectly intact. Here is my seal on it unbroken.



The Magistrate

Lock that up carefully, madame, for the assizes for sometime have had to deal with nothing but poisoning cases.

Gertrude

You see, sir, I have kept it in my desk, in which none but the General and myself have access.



Page 4

(Gertrude returns to her bedroom.)

Ramel General, we will not wait for the report of the autopsy. The principal charge, which you will agree with me was very serious, for all the town was talking of it, has been disproved; and we have full confidence in the skill and integrity of Doctor Vernon. (Gertrude returns) Champagne, you are at liberty. (General expression of satisfaction.) But you see, my friend, to what painful suspicions a man exposes himself when his home has a bad name.

Champagne Ask the General, your Honor, if I am not mild as a lamb; but my wife, God forgive her, was the worst that was ever made. An angel could not have stood her. If I have sometimes tried to bring her to reason, the anxious moments you have made me pass here, have been punishment enough! To be taken up for a prisoner, and to know yourself innocent, while you are in the hands of justice. (Weeps.)

The General
Well! well! You are acquitted now!

Napoleon
Papa, what is justice?

The General
Gentlemen, justice ought not to commit errors of this kind.

Gertrude
There seems to be always something fatal in this justice! And this poor man will always bear a bad name from your arrival here.

Ramel Madame, for the innocent there is nothing fatal in criminal justice. You see that Champagne has been promptly discharged. (Fixing his eyes upon Gertrude.) Those who live without reproach, who indulge no passions, save the noble and the lawful, have nothing to fear from justice.

Gertrude Sir, you do not know the people of this country. Ten years from this time they will say that Champagne poisoned his wife, that the officers of justice came to investigate and, but for our protection—

The General
Say no more, Gertrude. These gentlemen have done only their duty. (Felix prepares the coffee.) Gentlemen, can I offer you a cup of coffee?

The Magistrate
Thank you, General; the urgency of this affair called me away from



home rather suddenly, and my wife is waiting dinner for me at Louviers. (He goes on the veranda to talk with the doctor.)

The General (to Ramel)

You are a friend of Ferdinand's, I believe?

Ramel

Yes, General, and you have in him the noblest heart, the most spotless integrity, the most charming character that I have ever met.

Pauline

This state's attorney seems to be a very kind man!

Godard (aside)

And why does she say that? Is it because he praised M. Ferdinand? Ah! there's something there!

Gertrude (to Ramel)

Whenever you have any moments to spare, you must come to see M. de Charny. (To the General) Would not that be nice, dear?

The Magistrate (coming in from the veranda) M. de la Grandiere, our physician, agrees with Doctor Vernon that this death resulted from Asiatic cholera. We beg, therefore, that you, countess, and you, count, will excuse us for having disturbed, even for a moment, the tranquillity of your charming household.



Page 5

Ramel (to Gertrude in the front of the stage) Take care! God never protects undertakings so rash as yours. I have discovered all. Give up Ferdinand, leave his life free, and be satisfied with the happiness of a wife. The path which you are following leads to crime.

Gertrude
I'll die before I give him up!

Ramel (aside)
I must get Ferdinand away from this place.

(Ramel beckons to Ferdinand, takes his arm, and goes out with him after exchange of formal bows.)

The General
At last we are rid of them! (To Gertrude) Let the coffee be handed round.

Gertrude
Pauline, kindly ring for the coffee.

(Pauline rings.)

Scenefourth

The same persons, excepting Ferdinand, Ramel, the Magistrate and Baudrillon.

Godard (aside) I shall find out presently whether Pauline loves Ferdinand. This urchin, who wants to know about justice, seems to me pretty cute; I'll make use of him.

(Felix appears.)

Gertrude
The coffee.

(Felix brings in the tray.)

Godard (who has taken Napoleon aside)
Would you like to play a nice trick on somebody?

Napoleon
That I would. Do you know one?



Godard
Come with me, and I'll tell you how you must do it.

(Godard goes on the veranda with Napoleon.)

The General
Pauline, my coffee. (Pauline brings it to him.) It isn't sweet enough.
(Pauline gives him some sugar.) Thank you, dear.

Gertrude
M. de Rimonville?

The General
Godard?

Gertrude
M. de Rimonville?

The General
Godard, my wife wants to know if you would like some coffee?

Godard
Yes, thank you.

(Godard places himself in such a way as to watch Pauline.)

The General
It is pleasant to sit down and take a little coffee in quiet.

Napoleon (running in)
Mamma, mamma! My good friend Ferdinand has just fallen down; he has broken his leg and they are carrying him into the house.

Vernon
That's dreadful!

The General
How very unfortunate!

Pauline
Oh!

(Pauline falls back on her chair.)

Gertrude
What is that you said?



Napoleon

It is all a joke! I only wished to see if you all loved my good friend.

Gertrude

It is very naughty of you to act in that way; how did you come to think of such a trick?

Napoleon (whispering)

It was Godard.

Godard (aside)

She loves him! She was nicely caught by my trap, which I have never known to fail.

Gertrude (to Godard, as she offers him some coffee)

Are you aware, sir, that you would make a very indifferent preceptor?

It is very bad of you to teach a child such mischievous tricks.

Godard You will come to the conclusion that I did pretty well, when you learn that I have been enabled by this little stratagem to discover my rival.



Page 6

(Godard points to Ferdinand who is entering the room.)

Gertrude (letting fall the sugar basin)
He!

Godard (aside)
She is in the same box!

Gertrude (aloud)
You startled me.

The General (who has risen from his seat)
What is the matter with you, my dear child?

Gertrude Nothing; it is Godard's nonsense; he told me that the public prosecutor had come back. Felix, take away this sugar basin, and bring me another one.

Vernon
This is a day of surprises.

Gertrude M. Ferdinand, they are going to bring some sugar for you. (Aside) He is not looking at her. (Aloud) How is it, Pauline, you did not put any sugar in your father's coffee?

Napoleon
Why, of course, it was because she was too scared; didn't you hear her say "oh!"?

Pauline
Won't you hold your tongue, you little story-teller! You are always teasing me.

(Pauline sits on her father's knee, and puts sugar in his cup.)

Gertrude Can it be true? And to think that I have taken such pains in dressing her! (To Godard) If you are right, your marriage will take place in a fortnight. (Aloud) M. Ferdinand, here is your coffee.

Godard (aside) It seems that I caught two in my mouse-trap! And all the time the General is so calm, so tranquil, and this household is so peaceful! Things are getting mixed up. I shan't go yet; I wish to have a game of whist! Oh! I give up all thoughts of marriage for the present. (Glancing at Ferdinand) There's a lucky fellow! He is loved by two women—two charming, delightful creatures! He is indeed a factotum! But how is it that he is more successful than I am, who have an income of forty thousand?



Gertrude Pauline, my dear, offer the cards to the gentlemen for a game of whist. It is almost nine o'clock. If they are going to have a game, there is no time to be lost. (Pauline puts out the cards.) Come, Napoleon, bid good-night to the gentlemen, let them see you are a good boy, and don't try to stay up as you usually do.

Napoleon
Good-night, papa. What is justice like?

The General
Justice is blind! Good-night, my pet.

Napoleon
Good-night, M. Vernon! What is justice made of?

Vernon
It is made up of all our crimes. When you are naughty, they whip you; that is justice.

Napoleon
They never whip me.

Vernon
Then they never do justice to you!

Napoleon
Good-night, my good friend! Good-night, Pauline! Good-night M. Godard.

Godard
De Rimonville.

Napoleon
Have I been good?

(Gertrude kisses Napoleon.)

The General
I have the king.

Vernon
And I, the queen.

Ferdinand (to Godard)
Monsieur, we are partners.

Gertrude (seeing Marguerite)
Be sure to say your prayers, and don't provoke Marguerite. Now, go to bed, dear heart.

Page 7

Napoleon

Yes, dear heart! What is love made of?

(Exit Napoleon.)

Scenefifth

The same persons, except Napoleon.

The General

When that child begins to ask questions, he is an amusing youngster.

Gertrude

It is often very embarrassing to answer him. (To Pauline) Come, Pauline, let us go and finish our work.

Vernon

It is your lead, General.

The General Mine? You ought to get married, and we could visit at your house, as you visit here, and you would have all the happiness of a family. Don't forget, Godard, that there is no one in the department happier than I am.

Vernon

When a man reaches sixty-seven without reaching happiness, it is impossible to catch up. I shall die a bachelor.

(The two women set to work at the same piece of embroidery.)

Gertrude (seated with Pauline at the front of the stage) How is this, my child! Godard tells me that you received his advances very coldly; yet he is a very good match for you.

Pauline

My father, madame, has given me leave to choose a husband for myself.

Gertrude

Do you know what Godard will say? He will say that you refused him because you had already made your choice.

Pauline

If it were true, you and my father would know it. What reason have I for not giving you my confidence?

Gertrude I cannot say, and I do not blame you. You see in matters of love women keep their secret with heroic constancy, sometimes in the midst of the most cruel torments.



Pauline (aside, picking up the scissors, which she had let drop) Ferdinand was wise in telling me to distrust her—she is so insinuating!

Gertrude Perhaps you have in your heart a love like that. If such a misfortune has befallen you, you may rely on my help—I love you, remember! I can win your father's consent; he has confidence in me, and I can sway both his mind and affections. Therefore, dear child, you may open your heart to me.

Pauline

You can read my heart, madame, for I am concealing nothing from you.

The General

Vernon, what in the name of everything are you doing?

(Faint murmurs are heard among the card players; Pauline casts a look at them.)

Gertrude (aside) The question point-blank does not do with her. (Aloud) How happy you make me! For this provincial joker, Godard, avers that you almost fainted when he prompted Napoleon to declare that Ferdinand had broken his leg. Ferdinand is a pleasant young fellow, our intimate friend for some four years; what is more natural than your attachment for the youth, whose birth and talents are both in his favor?

Pauline

He is my father's clerk.

Gertrude

Thank God, you are not in love with him; I was a little anxious for the moment, for, my dear child, he is a married man.



Page 8

Pauline

What! He is married? Why then does he make a secret of it? (Aside) Married? That would be outrageous. I will ask him this evening. I will give him the signal on which we agreed to meet.

Gertrude (aside)

Not a line of her face changed! Godard is wrong, or this child is more self-possessed than I am. (Aloud) What is the matter with you, my pet?

Pauline

Oh! nothing.

Gertrude (touching Pauline's neck) Why, you are quite hot! Do you feel so? (Aside) She loves him, that is plain. But the question is, does he love her? I suffer the torments of the damned!

Pauline

I have been working too closely at this frame! And what, pray, is the matter with you?

Gertrude

Nothing. But you asked me why Ferdinand kept his marriage secret.

Pauline

Ah! yes!

Gertrude (rising, aside) If she is in love, she has a will of iron. But where can they have met? I never leave her in the daytime, and Champagne sees him all the time at the factory. No! it is absurd. If she does love him, it is without his knowledge, and she is like all other young girls, who begin to love a man in secret. But if they have come to an understanding, I have given her such a start that she will be sure to communicate with him about it, if only through her eyes. I will keep them both well in sight.

Godard

We have had wonderful luck, M. Ferdinand!

(Ferdinand leaves off playing and goes towards Gertrude.)

Pauline (aside)

I did not know that it was possible to suffer so much and yet live on.

Ferdinand (to Gertrude)

Madame, won't you take my place in the game?



Gertrude

Pauline, will you go instead? (Aside) I can't tell him that he loves Pauline, that would suggest what may be a new idea to him. What shall I do? (to Ferdinand) She has confessed all.

Ferdinand

Confessed what?

Gertrude

Why, all!

Ferdinand

I don't understand. Do you refer to *Mlle.* de Grandchamp?

Gertrude

Yes.

Ferdinand

And what has she been doing?

Gertrude

You have not been false to me? You do not want to kill me?

Ferdinand

Kill you? She? I?

Gertrude

Am I the victim of one of Godard's jokes?

Ferdinand

Gertrude, you are beside yourself!

Godard (to Pauline)

Ah! Mademoiselle, that is bad play!

Pauline

You lost a great deal by not taking my stepmother for a partner.

Gertrude (to Ferdinand)

Ferdinand, I do not know whether I am rightly or wrongly informed; but this I do know; I prefer death to the loss of our hopes.

Ferdinand

Take care! The doctor has been watching us very keenly for the last few days.



Gertrude (aside)

She has not once looked back at him! (Aloud) She will marry Godard,
for her father will compel her to do so.



Page 9

Ferdinand

Godard would make an excellent match for any one.

The General

I can't stay here any longer! My daughter plays vilely, and you, Vernon, have trumped my king!

Vernon

My dear General, it was a finesse.

The General You stupid! Come, it is ten o'clock, and time to go to sleep instead of playing cards. Ferdinand, be good enough to take Godard to his room. As for you, Vernon, you deserve to sleep on the floor as a punishment, for trumping my king.

Godard

It is, after all, merely a matter of five francs, General.

The General

It is also a matter of honor. (To Vernon) Come, now, although you have played so badly, let me hand you your hat and cane.

(Pauline takes a flower from the vase and plays with it.)

Gertrude (aside)

A signal! I will watch her this night, even though my husband should afterwards kill me for it!

Ferdinand (taking a candlestick from Felix)

M. de Rimonville, I am at your service.

Godard

I wish you good-night, madame. My respects to you, mademoiselle.

General, good-night.

The General

Good-night, Godard.

Godard

De Rimonville—Doctor, I—

Vernon (looking at him and blowing his nose)

Good-bye, my friend.

The General (attending the doctor on his way out)

Good-bye till to-morrow, Vernon, but come early.



Scenesixth

Gertrude, Pauline and the General.

Gertrude

My dear, Pauline refuses Godard.

The General

And what are your reasons, my daughter?

Pauline

I do not like him sufficiently to take him for a husband.

The General Well, never mind! We will look out some one else for you; but it is time for this to end, for you are now twenty-two, and people will begin to talk about you, my wife and me unless you make an early choice.

Pauline

May I not be permitted, if I choose, to remain single?

Gertrude

She has made her choice, but probably wishes to tell you by yourself.

I will leave you, and she will confess it. (To Pauline) Good-night, my child; talk freely with your father. (Aside) I will listen.

(Gertrude enters her chamber and proceeds to close the door.)

Sceneseventh

The General and Pauline.

The General (aside) Act as my daughter's confessor! I am utterly unfitted for such a task! She might rather act as confessor to me. (Aloud) Pauline, come here. (He takes her on his knee) Now, do you really think, my pet, that an old trooper like me doesn't understand your resolution to remain single? Why, of course, that means, in every language in which it has ever been uttered, that a young person is in a special hurry to be married—to some one that she is in love with.

Pauline

Papa, I would like to tell you something, but I cannot have confidence in you.



Page 10

The General
And why not, mademoiselle?

Pauline
Because you tell everything to your wife.

The General And you mean to tell me that you have a secret of such a kind that it cannot be revealed to an angel, to the woman who has educated you—to your second mother!

Pauline Oh! If you are going to be vexed, I shall get off to bed. I used to think that a father's heart would be a place of unfailing refuge for a daughter.

The General
You silly child! Come, I am going to be in a good humor.

Pauline
How kind you are! But listen! Suppose I were in love with the son of one of those whom you detest?

The General (rising abruptly to his feet and repulsing her)
I should detest you!

Pauline
And this is what you call being good humored?

(Gertrude appears.)

The General My child, there are feelings in my heart that you should never rouse in me; you ought to know this. They are my very life. Do you wish to be the death of your father?

Pauline
Oh!

The General Dear child! I have had my day. My lot, with you and Gertrude at my side, is an enviable one. But, however sweet and charming is my life, I would quit it without regret, if by that means I could render you happy; for happiness is a debt we owe to those who owe to us their existence.

Pauline (noticing the door ajar, aside) Ah! she is listening. (Aloud) Father, I didn't mean what I said, but suppose I felt a love of that kind and it was so violent that I was likely to die of it?



The General It would be best for you to tell me nothing about it, and wait for your happiness until my death. And yet, since there is nothing more sacred, nothing more dear next to God and country, than children to their parents, children in their turn ought to hold sacred their parents' wishes and never to disobey them, even after their death. If you do not remain faithful to this hatred of mine, I think I should come forth from my grave to curse you!

Pauline (kissing her father) Oh! you bad, bad man! At any rate, I shall now find out whether you can keep a secret or not. Swear to me on your honor that you'll not repeat a syllable of what I told you.

The General
I promise you that. But what reason have you for distrusting Gertrude?

Pauline
If I told you, you would not believe it.

The General
Are you trying to torture your father?

Pauline
No. But which do you place first,—this hatred for traitors, or your own honor?

The General
They are both first with me, for they are based upon a common principle.

Pauline
Very well; if you throw away your honor by violating your oath, you may as well throw away your hatred. That is all I wanted to find out.

The General If women are angelic, they have in them also something of the diabolical. Tell me, who has filled the head of such an innocent girl as you are with ideas like these? This is the way they lead us by the—



Page 11

Pauline (interrupting him)
Good-night, father.

The General
You naughty child!

Pauline
Keep my secret, or I will bring you a son-in-law that will drive you wild.

(Pauline enters her own apartment.)

Scene eighth

The General (alone)
There must certainly be some key to this enigma! It must be discovered! Yes, and Gertrude shall discover it!

(Scene curtain.)

Scene ninth

(Pauline's chamber; a small plain room with a bed in the centre and a round table at the left; the entrance is at the right, but there is a secret entrance on the left.)

Pauline At last I am alone! At last I can be natural! Married? My Ferdinand married? If this is so, he is the falsest, foulest, vilest of men! And I could kill him! Kill him? But I myself could not survive one hour the knowledge that he was actually married. My stepmother I detest! And if she becomes my enemy, there will be war between us, and war in earnest. It would be terrible, for I should tell my father all I know. (She looks at her watch.) Half-past eleven, and he cannot come before midnight, when the whole household is asleep. Poor Ferdinand! He has to risk his life for a few minutes' chat with her he loves! That is what I call true love! Such perils men will not undergo for every woman! But what would I not undergo for him! If my father surprised us, I would be the one to take the first blow. Oh! To suspect the man you love is to suffer greater torment than to lose him! If he dies, you can follow him in death; but doubt—is the cruelest of separations!—Ah! I hear him.

Scenetenth

Ferdinand and Pauline (who locks the door).

Pauline
Are you married?



Ferdinand

What a joke! Wouldn't I have told you?

Pauline

Ah! (She sinks back on a chair, then falls upon her knees.) Holy Virgin, what vows shall I make to thee? (She kisses Ferdinand's hand.) And you, a thousand blessings on your head!

Ferdinand

Who could have told you such a foolish thing?

Pauline

My stepmother.

Ferdinand Why, she knows all about me, and if she did not, she would set spies to discover all; for suspicion with such women as that is certitude! Listen, Pauline, moments now are precious. It was Madame de Grandchamp who brought me into this house.

Pauline

And why?

Ferdinand

Because she is in love with me.

Pauline

How horrible! And what of my father?

Ferdinand

She was in love with me before her marriage.

Pauline

She is in love with you; but you, are you in love with her?

Ferdinand

Do you think if I were, I should have remained in this house?

Pauline

And she is still in love with you?

Page 12

Ferdinand Yes, unhappily she is! I ought to tell you that she was at one time beloved by me; but to-day I hate her from the bottom of my heart, and I sometimes ask myself why. Is it because I am in love with you, and every genuine and pure love is by nature exclusive? Is it because the contrast between an angel of purity, such as you, and a devil like her excites in me just as much hatred towards her as it rouses love towards you, my joy, my bliss, my beauteous treasure? I cannot say. But I hate her, and I love you so much that I should not regret dying if your father killed me; for one talk with you, one hour spent in this chamber by your side, seems, even when it is passed away, a whole lifetime to me.

Pauline Oh, say those dear words again! For they bring back my confidence once more. After hearing you speak thus, I forgive you the wrong you have done me in telling that I am not your first and only love, as you are mine. It is but a lost illusion, that is all! Do not be vexed with me. Young girls are foolish, they have no ambition but in their love, and they would fain rule over the past as they rule over the future of their beloved! But you hate her! And in that word, you give me more proof of love than you have given me for the two years that we have loved. If only you knew with what cruelty this stepmother has put me on the rack, by her questions! But I will be avenged!

Ferdinand

You must be very careful! She is a very dangerous woman! She rules your father. She is a woman who will fight to the death!

Pauline

To the death! That is as I wish it!

Ferdinand Be prudent, dear Pauline! We are going to act in harmony, are we not? Well, my love, the prosecuting attorney is of opinion that if we would triumph over the difficulties that prevent our union, we must have fortitude enough to part for some time.

Pauline

Oh! Give me two days and I will win over my father!

Ferdinand But you do not know Madame de Grandchamp. She has gone too far to leave off without ruining you, and to do that she will go to any lengths. But I will not go away without giving you what may prove most effective weapons against her.

Pauline

Oh, give them, give them to me!

Ferdinand Not yet. And you must promise me not to make use of them, unless your life is in danger; for what I am doing is certainly a breach of confidence. But it is for your sake I do it.

Pauline
Tell me what it is?

Ferdinand To-morrow I shall put into your hands the letters which she wrote to me, some of them before, some of them after her marriage. Pauline, do not read them! Swear this to me, in the name of our love, in the name of our happiness! It will be sufficient, should it ever become absolutely necessary, that she knows that they are in your possession; at that moment you will see her trembling and groveling at your feet, for all her machinations then are foiled. But do not use them excepting as a last resort, and keep them well concealed.

Page 13

Pauline

What a terrible duel it will be!

Ferdinand Terrible! But, Pauline be courageous, as you have so far been, in keeping the secret of our love; do not acknowledge it, until you find it no longer possible to deny it.

Pauline Oh, why did your father betray the Emperor? If fathers knew how their children would be punished for the sins of their parents, there would be none but good men!

Ferdinand Perhaps this sad interview will prove the last moment of happiness we shall have!

Pauline (aside) I will rejoin him, if he leaves me—(Aloud) See, I no longer weep, I am full of courage! But tell me, will your friend know the place where you are hiding?

Ferdinand

Eugene will be our confidential friend.

Pauline

And the letters?

Ferdinand

To-morrow! To-morrow! But where will you conceal them?

Pauline

I shall keep them about me.

Ferdinand

Good! Farewell!

Pauline

Oh no, not yet!

Ferdinand

A moment more may ruin us.

Pauline

Or unite us for life. Come, let me show you out, I shall not rest until I see you in the garden. Come!

Ferdinand

Let me take one more glance at this maiden chamber, in which you will think of me—where all things speak of you.



(Scene curtain.)

Scene eleventh

(The drawing-room before described.)

Pauline on the veranda; Gertrude at the door of the room.

Gertrude

She is seeing him out! He has been deceiving me! So has she! (Taking Pauline by the hand, she leads her to the front of the stage.) Will you dare tell me, now, mademoiselle, that you do not love him?

Pauline

Madame, I am deceiving no one.

Gertrude

You are deceiving your father.

Pauline

And you, madame?

Gertrude

So both of you are against me—Oh, I shall—

Pauline

You shall do nothing, either against me or against him.

Gertrude

Do not compel me to show my power! You must be obedient to your father, and—he is obedient to me.

Pauline

We shall see!

Gertrude (aside)

Her coolness makes my blood boil. My brain reels! (Aloud) Do you know that I would rather die than live without him?

Pauline

And so would I, madame. But I am free. I have not sworn as you have to be faithful to a husband—And your husband is my father!

Gertrude (kneeling before Pauline)

What have I done to you? I have loved you, I have educated you, I have been a good mother to you.



Pauline

Be a faithful wife, and I will say no more.

Gertrude

Nay! Speak! Say all you like—Ah! the struggle has begun.

Scenetwelfth

The same persons and the General.



Page 14

The General

How is this? What is going on here?

Gertrude (to Pauline) You must feign sickness. Come lie down. (She makes her lie down.) I happened, my dear, to hear moans. Our dear child was calling for help; she was almost suffocated by the flowers in her bedroom.

Pauline

Yes, papa, Marguerite had forgotten to take away the vase of flowers, and I almost died.

Gertrude

Come, my daughter, come into the open air.

(Gertrude and Pauline go towards the door.)

The General

Stay a moment. What have you done with the flowers.

Pauline

I do not know where Madame has put them.

Gertrude

I threw them into the garden.

(The General abruptly rushes out, after setting his candle on the card table.)

Scenethirteenth

Pauline and Gertrude; later, the General.

Gertrude

Go back to your room, lock yourself in! I'll take all the blame.

(Pauline goes to her room.) I will wait for him here.

(Gertrude goes back into her room.)

The General (coming in from the garden) I can find the vase of flowers nowhere. There is some mystery in all these things. Gertrude?—There is no one here! Ah! Madame de Grandchamp, you will have to tell me!—It is a nice thing that I should be deceived by both wife and daughter!

Curtain to the Second Act.

ActIII



Scenefirst

(Same stage-setting. Morning.)

Gertrude; then Champagne.

Gertrude (brings a flower vase from the garden and puts it down on the table) What trouble I had to allay his suspicions! One or two more scenes like that and I shall lose control of him. But I have gained a moment of liberty now—provided Pauline does not come to trouble me! She must be asleep—she went to bed so late!—would it be possible to lock her in her room? (She goes to the door of Pauline's chamber, but cannot find the key.) I am afraid not.

Champagne (coming in)
M. Ferdinand is coming, madame.

Gertrude
Thank you, Champagne. He went to bed very late, did he not?

Champagne
M. Ferdinand makes his rounds, as you know, every night, and he came in at half-past one o'clock. I sleep over him, and I heard him.

Gertrude
Does he ever go to bed later than that?

Champagne
Sometimes he does, but that is according to the time he makes his rounds.

Gertrude Very good. Thank you, Champagne. (Exit Champagne.) As the reward for a sacrifice which has lasted for twelve years, and whose agonies can only be understood by women,—for what man can guess at such tortures!—what have I asked? Very little! Merely to know that he is here, near to me, without any satisfaction saving, from time to time, a furtive glance at him. I wished only to feel sure that he would wait for me. To feel

Page 15

sure of this is enough for us, us for whom a pure, a heavenly love is something never to be realized. Men never believe that they are loved by us, until they have brought us down into the mire! And this is how he has rewarded me! He makes nocturnal assignations with this stupid girl! Ah! He may as well pronounce my sentence of death; and if he has the courage to do so, I shall have the courage at once to bring about their eternal separation; I can do it! But here he comes! I feel faint! My God! Why hast Thou made me love with such desperate devotion him who no longer loves me!

Scenesecund

Ferdinand and Gertrude.

Gertrude Yesterday you deceived me. You came here last night, through this room, entering by means of a false key, to see Pauline, at the risk of being killed by M. de Grandchamp! Oh! you needn't lie about it. I saw you, and I came upon Pauline just as you concluded your nocturnal promenade. You have made a choice upon which I cannot offer you my congratulations. If only you had heard us discussing the matter, on this very spot! If you had seen the boldness of this girl, the effrontery with which she denied everything to me, you would have trembled for your future, that future which belongs to me, and for which I have sold myself, body and soul.

Ferdinand (aside) What an avalanche of reproach! (Aloud) Let us try, Gertrude, both of us, to behave wisely in this matter. Above all things, let us try to avoid base accusations. I shall never forget what you have been to me; I still entertain towards you a friendship which is sincere, unalterable and absolute; but I no longer love you.

Gertrude
That is, since eighteen months ago.

Ferdinand
No. Since three years ago.

Gertrude You must admit then that I have the right to detest and make war upon your love for Pauline; for this love has rendered you a traitor and criminal towards me.

Ferdinand
Madame!

Gertrude Yes, you have deceived me. In standing as you did between us two, you made me assume a character which is not mine. I am violent as you know. Violence is frankness, and I am living a life of outrageous duplicity. Tell me, do you know what it is to have to invent new lies, on the spur of the moment, every day,—to live with a dagger at your heart? Oh! This lying! But for us, it is the Nemesis of happiness. It is



disgraceful, when it succeeds; it is death, when it fails. And you, other men envy you because you make women love you. You will be applauded, while I shall be despised. And you do not wish me to defend myself! You have nothing but bitter words for a woman who has hidden from you everything—her remorse—her tears! I have suffered alone and without you the wrath of heaven; alone and without you I have descended into my soul's abyss, an abyss which has been opened by the earthquake of sorrow; and, while repentance was gnawing at my heart, I had for you nothing but looks of tenderness, and smiles of gaiety! Come, Ferdinand, do not despise a slave who lies in such utter subjection to your will!

Page 16

Ferdinand (aside) I must put an end to this. (Aloud) Listen to me, Gertrude. When first we met it was youth alone united us in love. I then yielded, you may say, to an impulse of that egotism which lies at the bottom of every man's heart, though he knows it not, concealed under the flowers of youthful passion. There is so much turbulence in our sentiments at twenty-two! The infatuation which may seize us then, permits us not to reflect either upon life as it really is, or upon the seriousness of its issues—

Gertrude (aside)

How calmly he reasons upon it all! Ah! It is infamous!

Ferdinand And at that time I loved you freely, with entire devotion; but afterwards—afterwards, life changed its aspect for both of us. If you ask why I remained under a roof which I should never have approached, it is because I chose in Pauline the only women with whom it was possible for me to end my days. Come, Gertrude, do not break yourself to pieces against the barrier raised by heaven. Do not torture two beings who ask you to yield to them happiness, and who will ever love you dearly.

Gertrude Ah, I see! You are the martyr—and I—I am the executioner! Would not I have been your wife to-day, if I had not set your happiness above the satisfaction of my love?

Ferdinand

Very well! Do the same thing to-day, by giving me my liberty.

Gertrude

You mean the liberty of loving some one else. That is not the way you spoke twelve years ago. Now it will cost my life.

Ferdinand

It is only in romance that people die of love. In real life they seek consolation.

Gertrude Do not you men die for your outraged honor, for a word, for a gesture? Well, there are women who die for their love, that is, when their love is a treasure which has become their all, which is their very life! And I am one of those women. Since you have been under this roof, Ferdinand, I have feared a catastrophe every moment. Yes. And I always carry about me something which will enable me to quit this life, the very moment that misfortune falls on us. See! (She shows him a phial.) Now you know that life that I have lived!

Ferdinand

Ah! you weep!

Gertrude I swore that I would keep back these tears, but they are strangling me! For you—While you speak to me with that cold politeness which is your last insult,—your



last insult to a love which you repudiate!—you show not the least sympathy towards me! You would like to see me dead, for then you would be unhampered by me. But, Ferdinand, you do not know me! I am willing to confess everything to the General, whom I would not deceive. This lying fills me with disgust! I shall take my child, I shall come to your house, we will flee together. But no more of Pauline!

Ferdinand

If you did this, I would kill myself.

Gertrude

And I, too, would kill myself! Then we should be united in death, and you would never be hers!

Page 17

Ferdinand (aside)
What an infernal creature!

Gertrude
And there is this consideration. What would you do if the barrier which separates you from Pauline were never broken down?

Ferdinand
Pauline will be able to maintain her own independence.

Gertrude
But if her father should marry her to some one else?

Ferdinand
It would be my death.

Gertrude People die of love in romance. In real life they console themselves with some one else, and a man only does his duty by being true to her with whom he has plighted troth.

The General (outside)
Gertrude! Gertrude!

Gertrude I hear the general calling. (The General appears.) You will then finish your business as quickly as you can, M. Ferdinand, and return promptly; I shall wait for you here.

(Exit Ferdinand.)

Scenethird

The General, Gertrude, then Pauline.

The General
This is rather early in the morning for you to be holding a conference with Ferdinand! What were you discussing? The factory?

Gertrude What were we discussing? I will tell you; for you are exactly like your son; when once you begin to ask questions, you must have a direct answer. I had an impression that Ferdinand had something to do with Pauline's refusal to marry Godard.

The General
When I come to think of it, you were perhaps right.



Gertrude I got M. Ferdinand to come here for the purpose of clearing up my suspicions, and you interrupted us at the very moment when I seemed likely to gain some information.

(Pauline pushes the door ajar unseen.)

The General
But if my daughter is in love with M. Ferdinand—

Pauline (aside)
I must listen.

The General I do not see why, when I questioned her yesterday in a paternal manner and with absolute kindness, she should have concealed it from me, for I left her perfectly free, and her feeling for him would be absolutely natural.

Gertrude She probably misunderstood you or you questioned her before she had made up her mind. The heart of a young girl, as you ought to know, is full of contradictions.

The General And why should there not be something between them? This young man toils with the courage of a lion, he is the soul of honor, he is probably of good family.

Pauline (aside)
I understand the situation now.

(Pauline withdraws.)

The General He will give us information on this point. He is above all things trustworthy; but you ought to know his family, for it was you who discovered this treasure for us.

Gertrude
I proposed him to you on the recommendation of old Madame Morin.

The General
But she is dead!

Gertrude (aside)
It is very lucky that I quoted her then! (Aloud) She told me that his mother was Madame de Charny to whom he is devoted; she lives in Brittany and belongs to the Charnys, an old family of that country.



Page 18

The General The Charnys. Then if he is in love with Pauline, and Pauline with him, I, for my part, would prefer him to Godard in spite of Godard's fortune. Ferdinand understands the business of the factory, he could buy the whole establishment with the dowry of Pauline. That would be understood. All he has to do is to tell us where he comes from, who he is, and who his father was. But we will see his mother.

Gertrude
Madame Charny?

The General
Yes, Madame Charny. Doesn't she live near Saint-Melo? That is by no means at the other end of the world.

Gertrude
Just use a little tact, some of the manoeuvres of an old soldier, and be very gentle, and you will soon learn whether this child—

The General
Why should I worry about it? Here comes Pauline herself.

Scenefourth

The same persons, Marguerite, then Pauline.

The General
Ah! It is you, Marguerite. You came near causing the death of my daughter last night by your carelessness. You forgot—

Marguerite
I, General, cause the death of my child!

The General
You forgot to take away the vase containing flowers of a strong scent, and she was almost suffocated.

Marguerite
Impossible! I took away the vase before the arrival of M. Godard, and Madame must have seen that it was not there while we were dressing Mademoiselle—

Gertrude
You are mistaken. It was there.



Marguerite (aside) She's a hard one. (Aloud) Does not Madame remember that she wished to put some natural flowers in Mademoiselle's hair, and that she remarked about the vase being gone?

Gertrude
You are inventing a story. But where did you carry it?

Marguerite
To the foot of the veranda.

Gertrude (to the General)
Did you find it there last night?

The General
No.

Gertrude
I took it from the chamber myself last night, and put it where it now stands. (Points to the vase of flowers on the veranda.)

Marguerite
Sir, I swear to you by my eternal salvation—

Gertrude
Do not swear. (Calling.) Pauline!

The General
Pauline!

(Pauline appears.)

Gertrude
Was the vase of flowers in your room last night?

Pauline
Yes. Marguerite, my dear old friend, you must have forgotten it.

Marguerite
Why don't you say, Mademoiselle, that some one put it there on purpose to make you ill!

Gertrude
Whom do you mean by some one?

The General
You old fool, if your memory failed you, it is unnecessary for you, at any rate, to accuse anybody else.



Pauline (aside to Marguerite)

Keep silence! (Aloud) Marguerite, it was there! You forgot it.

Marguerite

It is true, sir, I was thinking of the day before yesterday.



Page 19

The General (aside) She has been in my service for twenty years. Strange that she should be so persistent! (Takes Marguerite aside.) Come! What did you say about the flowers for my daughter's hair?

Marguerite (while Pauline makes signs to her)
I said that, sir—I am so old that my memory is treacherous.

The General
But even then, why did you suppose that any one in the house had an evil thought towards—

Pauline
Say no more, father! She has so much affection for me, dear Marguerite, that she is sometimes distracted by it.

Marguerite (aside)
I am quite sure I took away the flowers.

The General (aside) Why should my wife and my daughter deceive me? An old trooper like me doesn't permit himself to be caught between two fires, and there is something decidedly crooked—

Gertrude
Marguerite, we will take tea in this room when M. Godard comes down. Tell Felix to bring in all the newspapers.

Marguerite
Very good, madame.

Scenefifth

Gertrude, the General and Pauline.

The General (kissing his daughter)
You've not even said good-morning to me, you unnatural child.

Pauline (kissing him) But, you began by scolding about nothing. I declare, father, I am going to undertake your education. It is quite time for you, at your age, to control yourself a little,—a young man would not be so quick as you are! You have terrified Marguerite, and when women are in fear, they tell little falsehoods, and you can get nothing out of them.

The General (aside) I'm in for it now! (Aloud) Your conduct, young lady, does not do much towards promoting my self-control. I wish you to marry, and I propose a man who is young—



Pauline

Handsome and well educated!

The General Please keep silence, when your father addresses you, mademoiselle. A man who possesses a magnificent fortune, at least six times as much as yours, and you refuse him. You are well able to do so, because I leave you free in the matter; but if you do not care for Godard, tell me who it is you choose, if I do not already know.

Pauline

Ah, father, you are much more clear-sighted than I am. Tell me who he is?

The General He is a man from thirty to thirty-five years old, who pleases me much more than Godard does, although he is without fortune. He is already a member of our family.

Pauline

I don't see any of our relations here.

The General

I wonder what you can have against this poor Ferdinand, that you should be unwilling—

Pauline

Ah! Who has been telling you this story? I'll warrant that it is Madame de Grandchamp.

The General

A story? I suppose, you will deny the truth of it! Have you never thought of this fine young fellow?

Pauline

Never!

Gertrude (to the General)

She is lying! Just look at her.

Page 20

Pauline Madame de Grandchamp has doubtless her reasons for supposing that I have an attachment for my father's clerk. Oh! I see how it is, she wishes you to say: "If your heart, my daughter, has no preference for any one, marry Godard." (In a low voice to Gertrude) This, madame, is an atrocious move! To make me abjure my love in my father's presence! But I will have my revenge.

Gertrude (aside to Pauline)
As you choose about that; but marry Godard you shall!

The General (aside)
Can it be possible that these two are at variance? I must question Ferdinand. (Aloud) What were you saying to each other?

Gertrude
Your daughter, my dear, did not like my idea that she was taken with a subordinate; she is deeply humiliated at the thought.

The General
Am I to understand, then, my daughter, that you are not in love with him?

Pauline Father, I—I do not ask you to marry me to any one! I am perfectly happy! The only thing which God has given us women, as our very own, is our heart. I do not understand why Madame de Grandchamp, who is not my mother, should interfere with my feelings.

Gertrude My child, I desire nothing but your happiness. I am merely your stepmother, I know, but if you had been in love with Ferdinand, I should have—

The General (kissing Gertrude's hand)
How good you are!

Pauline (aside)
I feel as if I were strangled! Ah! If I could only undo her!

Gertrude
Yes, I should have thrown myself at your father's feet, to win his consent, if he had refused it.

The General
Here comes Ferdinand. (Aside) I shall question him at my discretion; and then perhaps the mystery will be cleared up.

Scenesixth

The same persons and Ferdinand.

The General (to Ferdinand) Come here, my friend. You have been with us over three years now, and I am indebted to you for the power of sleeping soundly amid all the cares of an extensive business. You are almost as much as I am the master of my factory. You have been satisfied with a salary, pretty large it is true, but scarcely proportionate perhaps to the services rendered by you. I think at last I understand the motive of your disinterestedness.

Ferdinand
It is my duty, General.

The General Granted; but does not the heart count for a good deal in this? Come now, Ferdinand, you know my way of considering the different ranks of society, and the distinctions pertaining to them. We are all the sons of our own works. I have been a soldier. You may therefore have full confidence in me. They have told me all; how you love a certain young person, here present. If you desire it, she shall be yours. My wife had pleaded your cause, and I must acknowledge that she has gained it before the tribunal of my heart.

Ferdinand General, can this be true? Madame de Grandchamp has pleaded my cause? Ah, madame! (He falls on his knees before her.) I acknowledge in this your greatness of heart! You are sublime, you are an angel! (Rising and rushing forward to Pauline.) Pauline, my Pauline!



Page 21

Gertrude (to the General)

I guessed aright; he is in love with Pauline.

Pauline Sir, have I ever given you the right, by a single look, or by a single word, to utter my name in this way? No one could be more astonished than I am to find that I have inspired you with sentiments which might flatter others, but which I can never reciprocate; I have a higher ambition.

The General Pauline, my child, you are more than severe. Come, tell me, is there not some misunderstanding here? Ferdinand, come here, come close to me.

Ferdinand

How is it, mademoiselle, when your stepmother, and your father agree?

Pauline (in a low voice to Ferdinand)

We are lost!

The General

Now I am going to act the tyrant. Tell me, Ferdinand, of course your family is an honorable one?

Pauline (to Ferdinand)

You hear that!

The General

Your father must certainly have been a man of as honorable a profession as mine was; my father was sergeant of the watch.

Gertrude (aside)

They are now separated forever.

Ferdinand Ah! (To Gertrude) I understand your move. (To the General) General, I do not deny that once in a dream, long ago, in a sweet dream, in which it was delicious for a man poor and without family to indulge in—dreams we are told are all the fortune that ever comes to the unfortunate—I do not deny that I once regarded it as a piece of overwhelming happiness to become a member of your family; but the reception which mademoiselle accords to those natural hopes of mine, and which you have been cruel enough to make me reveal, is such that at the present moment they have left my heart, never again to return! I have been rudely awakened from that dream, General. The poor man has his pride, which it is as ungenerous in the rich man to wound, as it would be for any one to insult—mark what I say—your attachment to Napoleon. (In a low voice to Gertrude) You are playing a terrible part!

Gertrude (aside to Ferdinand)

She shall marry Godard.



The General Poor young man! (To Pauline) He is everything that is good! He inspires me with affection. (He takes Ferdinand aside.) If I were in your place, and at your age, I would have—No, no, what the devil am I saying?—After all she is my daughter!

Ferdinand General, I make an appeal to your honor; swear that you will keep, as the most profound secret, what I am going to confide to you; and this secrecy must extend so far even as to Madame de Grandchamp.

The General (aside)

What is this? He also, like my daughter, seems to distrust my wife.
But, by heaven, I will learn what it means! (Aloud) I consent; you have the word of a man who has never once broken a promise given.

Ferdinand After having forced me to reveal that which I had buried in the recesses of my heart, and after I have been thunderstruck, for that is the only word in which to express it, by the disdain of Mademoiselle Pauline, it is impossible for me to remain here any longer. I shall therefore put my accounts in order; this evening I shall quit this place, and to-morrow will leave France for America, if I can find a ship sailing from Havre.



Page 22

The General (aside)

It is as well that he should leave, for he will be sure to return. (To Ferdinand) May I tell this to my daughter?

Ferdinand

Yes, but to no one else.

The General (aside to Pauline) Pauline! My daughter, you have so cruelly humiliated this poor youth, that the factory is on the point of losing its manager; Ferdinand is to leave this evening for America.

Pauline (to the General)

He is right, father. He is doing of his own accord, what you doubtless would have advised him to do.

Gertrude (to Ferdinand)

She shall marry Godard.

Ferdinand (to Gertrude)

If I do not punish you for your atrocious conduct, God Himself will!

The General (to Pauline)

America is a long way off and the climate is deadly.

Pauline (to the General)

Many a fortune is made there.

The General (aside) She does not love him. (To Ferdinand) Ferdinand, you must not leave before I have put in your hands sufficient to start you on the road to fortune.

Ferdinand I thank you, General; but what is due me will be sufficient. Moreover, I shall not be missed in your factory, for I have trained Champagne so thoroughly as a foreman, that he is skillful enough to become my successor; and if you will go with me to the factory, you will see—

The General I will gladly accompany you. (Aside) Everything is in such a muddle here, that I must go and look for Vernon. The advice and clear-sightedness of my old friend, the doctor, will be of service in ferreting out what it is that disturbs this household, for there is something or other. Ferdinand, I will follow you. Ladies, we will be soon be back again. (Aside) There is something or other!

(The General follows Ferdinand out.)

Sceneseventh



Gertrude and Pauline.

Pauline (locking the door) Madame, do you consider that a pure love, a love which comprises and enhances all human happiness, which makes us understand that happiness which is divine,—do you consider such a love to be dearer and more precious to us than life?

Gertrude You have been reading the *Nouvelle Heloise*, my dear. What you say is rather stilted in diction, but it is nevertheless true.

Pauline

Well, madame, you have just caused me to commit suicide.

Gertrude The very act you would have been happy to see me commit; and if you had succeeded in forcing me to it, you would have felt in your heart the joy which fills mine at present.

Pauline According to my father, war between civilized nations has its laws; but the war which you wage against me, madame, is that of savages.

Gertrude You may do as I do, if you can—but you can do nothing! You shall marry Godard. He is a very good match for you; you will be very happy, I assure you, for he has fine qualities.

Pauline

And you think that I will quietly let you marry Ferdinand?

Page 23

Gertrude

After the few words which we have exchanged this evening, why should we now indulge in the language of hypocrisy? I was in love with Ferdinand, my dear Pauline, when you were but eight years old.

Pauline But now you are more than thirty—and I am still young. Moreover, he hates you, he abhors you! He has told me so, and he wishes to have nothing to do with a woman capable of the black treachery with which you have acted towards my father.

Gertrude

In the eyes of Ferdinand, my love will serve as my vindication.

Pauline

He shares the feelings which I have for you; he despises you, madame.

Gertrude Do you really believe it? Well, if it is so, my dear, I have one more reason for the position I take, for if he refuses to become my husband, to gratify his love, Pauline, you will force me to marry him for the sake of satisfying my revenge. When he came to this house, was he not aware that I was here?

Pauline

You probably caught him by some such snare as you have just set for us, and into which both of us have fallen.

Gertrude Now, my child, a single word more will put an end to everything between us. Have you not said a hundred times, a thousand times, in moments when you were all feeling, all soul, that you would make the greatest sacrifices for Ferdinand?

Pauline

Yes, madame.

Gertrude

You said you would leave your father, would flee from France; you would give your life, your honor, your salvation for Ferdinand?

Pauline

Yes, and if there is anything else that I can offer besides myself—this world and heaven!

Gertrude Let me tell you, then, that all that you have wished to do, I have done! It is enough therefore to assure you that nothing, not even death itself, can arrest my course.

Pauline In saying this, you give me the right to defend myself before my father. (Aside) O Ferdinand! Our love, (Gertrude takes a seat on the sofa during the soliloquy of



Pauline) as she has said, is greater than life. (To Gertrude) Madame, you must repair all the evil that you have done to me; the sole difficulties which lie in the way of my marriage with Ferdinand, you must overcome. Yes, you who have complete control over my father, you must make him forego his hatred of the son of General Marcandal.

Gertrude
And do you really mean that?

Pauline
Yes, madame.

Gertrude
And what means do you possess formidable enough to compel me to do so?

Pauline
Are we not carrying on a warfare of savages?

Gertrude Say rather, of women, which is even more terrible! Savages torment the body alone; while we direct our arrows against the heart, the self-love, the pride, the soul of those whom we attack in the very midst of their happiness.

Pauline That is truly said. It is the whole woman-nature that I attack. Therefore, my dear and truly honored stepmother, you must eliminate by to-morrow, and not later, all the obstacles that stand between me and Ferdinand; or you may be sure my father shall learn from me the whole course of your conduct, both before and after your marriage.



Page 24

Gertrude

Ah! That is the way you are going to do it! Poor child! He will never believe you.

Pauline

Oh, I know the domination you exercise over my father; but I have proofs.

Gertrude

Proofs! Proofs!

Pauline I went to Ferdinand's house—I am very inquisitive—and I found there your letters, madame; I took from among them those which would convince even the blindness of my father, for they will prove to him—

Gertrude

What will they prove?

Pauline

Everything!

Gertrude

But this will be, unhappy child, both theft and murder! For think of his age.

Pauline And have not you accomplished the murder of my happiness? Have you not forced me to deny, both to my father and to Ferdinand, my love, my glory, my life?

Gertrude (aside)

This is a mere trick; she knows nothing. (Aloud) This is a clever stratagem, but I never wrote a single line. What you say is not true. It is impossible. Where are the letters?

Pauline

They are in my possession.

Gertrude

In your room?

Pauline

They are where you can never reach them.

Gertrude (aside) Madness with its wildest dreams spins through my brain! My fingers itch for murder. It is in such moments as this that men kill each other! How gladly



would I kill her! My God! Do not forsake me! Leave me my reason! (Aloud) Wait a moment.

Pauline (aside) My thanks to you, Ferdinand! I see how much you love me; I have been able to pay back to her all the wrongs she did us a short time ago—and—she shall save us from all we feared!

Gertrude (aside) She must have them about her,—but how can I be sure of that? Ah! (Aloud) Pauline! If you have had those letters for long, you must have known that I was in love with Ferdinand. You can only lately have received them.

Pauline
They came into my hands this morning.

Gertrude
You have not read them all?

Pauline
Enough to find out that they would ruin you.

Gertrude Pauline, life is just beginning for you. (A knock is heard.) Ferdinand is the first man, young, well educated and distinguished, for he is distinguished, by whom you have been attracted; but there are many others in the world such as he is. Ferdinand has been in a certain sense under the same roof with you, and you have seen him every day; the first impulses of your heart have therefore directed you to him. I understand this, and it is quite natural. Had I been in your place I should doubtless have experienced the same feelings. But, my dear, you know not the ways either of the world or of society. And if, like so many other women, you have been deceiving yourself—for we women, ah, how often are we thus deceived!—you still can make another choice. But for me the deed has been done, I have no other choice to make. Ferdinand is all

Page 25

I have, for I have passed my thirtieth year, and I have sacrificed to him what I should have kept unsullied—the honor of an aged man. The field is clear for you, you may yet love some other man more ardently than you can love to-day—this is my experience. Pauline, child, give him up, and you will learn what a devoted slave you will have in me! You will have more than a mother, more than a friend, you will have the unstinted help of a soul that is lost! Oh! listen to me! (She kneels, and raises her hands to Pauline's corsage.) Behold me at your feet, acknowledging you my rival! Is this sufficient humiliation for me? Oh, if you only knew what this costs a woman to undergo! Relent! Relent, and save me. (A loud knocking is heard, she takes advantage of Pauline's confusion to feel for the letters.) Give back my life to me! (Aside) She has them!

Pauline

Oh, leave me, madame! Will you force me to call for some one?

(Pauline pushes Gertrude away, and proceeds to open the door.)

Gertrude (aside)

I was not deceived, she has them about her; but I must not leave them with her one single hour.

Sceneeighth

The same persons, the General and Vernon.

The General

You two, locked in together! Why did you call out, Pauline?

Vernon

How pale you are, my child! Let me feel your pulse.

The General (to Gertrude)

And you also seem to be very much excited.

Gertrude

There was a joke between us and we were indulging in a laugh; weren't we, Pauline? You were laughing, my pet?

Pauline

Yes, papa. Dear mamma and I were in a gale of laughter.

Vernon (in a low voice to Pauline)

That's a pretty big lie!



The General
Didn't you hear us knocking?

Pauline
We heard quite plainly, papa; but we didn't know it was you.

The General (in a low voice to Vernon)
They seem to be leagued against me. (Aloud) But what was it all about?

Gertrude Dear husband, you always want to know everything! We were speaking for the moment about the tenants, about some acquaintance of ours. But let me go and ring for tea.

The General
But tell me all about it?

Gertrude
Why this is sheer tyranny! To tell the truth, we locked ourselves in so that no one would disturb us. Is that plain enough?

Vernon
I should think it quite plain.

Gertrude (whispering to the General) I wished to worm her secrets out of your daughter, for it is evident that she has some secrets! And you come interrupting us, while I am working in your service—for Pauline is not my daughter; you arrive, as if you were charging a hostile squadron, and interrupt us, at the very moment I was going to learn something.

The General
Madame the Countess of Grandchamp, ever since the arrival of Godard—

Gertrude
Ah! yes, Godard. Well! he is still here.



Page 26

The General

Do not ridicule my words! Ever since yesterday nothing has gone as usual! By God! I'd like to know—

Gertrude Sir, this oath is the first I have ever heard from you. Felix, bring in the tea. (To the General) You are tired, it seems, of twelve years of happiness?

The General I am not, and never will be a tyrant. A little time ago I came unexpectedly upon you and Ferdinand engaged in conversation, and I felt I was in the way. Again, I come home and you are locked in with my daughter, and my appearance seemed to put you out. And to cap all, last night—

Vernon Come, General, you can quarrel with Madame as much as you like, but not before other people. (Godard is heard approaching.) I hear Godard. (Whispers to the General) Is this keeping your promise to me? In treating with women—I am bound as a doctor to admit it—you must leave them to betray themselves; while at the same time you watch them carefully; otherwise your violence draws forth their tears, and when once the hydraulic machinery begins to play, they drown a man as if they had the strength of a triple Hercules!

Sceneninth

The same persons and Godard.

Godard Ladies, I came once before to present my compliments and respects to you, but I found the door closed. General, I wish you good-day. (The General takes up a newspaper and waves his hand in greeting.) Ah! Here is my adversary of yesterday's game. Have you come to take your revenge, doctor?

Vernon

No, I came to take some tea.

Godard

Ah! I see you keep up the custom of the English, Russians and Chinese.

Pauline

Would you prefer some coffee?

Godard No, no; allow me to have some tea; I will, for once, deviate from my every-day custom. Moreover, you have your luncheon at noon, I see, and a cup of coffee with cream would take away my appetite for that meal. And then the English, the Russians and the Chinese are not entirely incorrect in taste.

Vernon

Tea, sir, is an excellent thing.



Godard
Yes, when it is good.

Pauline
This is caravan tea.

Gertrude
Doctor, have you seen the papers? (To Pauline) Go and talk to M. de Rimonville, my daughter, I, myself, will make tea.

Godard
Perhaps *Mlle.* De Grandchamp likes my conversation no better than my person?

Pauline
You are mistaken, sir.

The General
Godard—

Pauline Should you do me the favor of no longer seeking me in marriage, you would still possess in my eyes qualities of sufficient brilliancy to captivate the young ladies Boudeville, Clinville, Derville, *etc.*

Godard That is enough, mademoiselle. Ah! How you do ridicule an unfortunate lover, in spite of his income of forty thousand francs! The longer I stay here, the more I regret it. What a lucky fellow M. Ferdinand de Charny is!



Page 27

Pauline

Lucky? Why is he lucky? Poor fellow! Does his good fortune consist in the fact that he is my father's clerk?

Gertrude

M. de Rimonville—

The General

Godard—

Gertrude

M. de Rimonville—

The General

Godard, my wife is speaking to you.

Gertrude

Do you like much or little sugar?

Godard

A moderate quality.

Gertrude

Not much cream, I suppose?

Godard On the contrary, plenty of cream, countess. (To Pauline) Ah, M. Ferdinand is not then, after all the man who—whom you have distinguished by your favor? I can at least assure you that he is very much to the taste of your stepmother.

Pauline (aside)

How annoying these inquisitive provincials are!

Godard (aside)

It is fair that I should amuse myself a little at her expense before I take leave. I must get something out of this visit.

Gertrude

M. de Rimonville, if you desire anything solid, there are sandwiches here.

Godard

Thank you, madame.

Gertrude (whispering to Godard)

Your cause is not wholly lost.



Godard

O madame! I have thought a great deal over my rejection by *Mlle. de Grandchamp*.

Gertrude

Ah! (To the doctor) Doctor, you will take yours as usual, I suppose?

Vernon

If you please, madame.

Godard (to Pauline)

Did you say, "poor fellow," mademoiselle? For M. Ferdinand is not so poor as you think him. He is richer than I am!

Pauline

How do you know that?

Godard

I am certain of it, and I will tell you why. This M. Ferdinand, whom you think you know, is an exceedingly crafty fellow—

Pauline (aside)

Can he possibly know his real name?

Gertrude (aside)

A few drops of opium in her tea will put her to sleep, and I shall be saved.

Godard (to Pauline)

You cannot deny the authority of him who has put me on the track.

Pauline

Oh, sir! Kindly tell—

Godard

It was the prosecuting attorney. I remembered that at the house of the Boudevilles it was said that your clerk—

Pauline (aside)

He is putting me on the rack.

Gertrude (offering a cup to Pauline)

Here, Pauline.

Vernon (aside)

Am I dreaming? I thought I saw her put something into Pauline's cup.



Pauline (to Godard)
And what did they say?

Godard Ah! Ah! How attentive you are! I should have been exceedingly flattered to think that you put on that air when any one was talking about me, as I am now talking about M. Ferdinand de Charny.

Pauline
What a strange taste this tea has! You find yours good?

Godard
You talk about the tea in order to distract my attention from the interest you take in what I am telling you. I see through it all!
Well, come now, I am going to astonish you. You must know that M. Ferdinand is—



Page 28

Pauline
Is—?

Godard
A millionaire.

Pauline
You are joking, M. Godard.

Godard
On my word of honor, mademoiselle, he possesses a treasure. (Aside)
She is madly in love with him.

Pauline (aside)
How this fool startled me.

(Pauline rises from her seat and Vernon takes the teacup from her hand.)

Vernon
Let me take it, my child.

The General (to his wife)
What ails you, dearest? You seem—

Vernon (who has retained Pauline's cup and returned his own in its place to Gertrude.
Aside) It is laudanum; fortunately the dose is light; but it is very certain that something is
about to happen. (To Godard) M. Godard, you are a crafty fox. (Godard takes out his
handkerchief as if to blow his nose.) Ah!

Godard
Doctor, I bear no ill-will.

Vernon
Listen! Do you think that you could carry off the General to the
factory and keep him there for an hour.

Godard
I would like to have that youngster to help me.

Vernon
He is at school until dinner-time.

Godard
Why do you wish me to do this?



Vernon

Now I beg of you, for you are a good fellow, to do as I bid you; it is necessary. Do you love Pauline?

Godard I did love her yesterday, but this morning— (Aside) I must find out what he is concealing from me. (To Vernon) It shall be done! I will go on to the veranda and come back again with a message that Ferdinand sends for the General. You may rely upon me. Ah! Here is Ferdinand himself, that is all right!

(Godard goes on the veranda.)

Pauline

'Tis peculiar, how drowsy I feel.

(Pauline lies down on the divan; Ferdinand appears and talks with Godard.)

Scenetenth

The same persons and Ferdinand.

Ferdinand

General, it will be necessary for you to come to the office and the factory in order to verify my accounts.

The General

That is only just to you.

Pauline (drowsily)

Ferdinand!

Godard

Ah, General, I'll take advantage of this occasion to visit your establishment with you, for I have never seen it.

The General

Very good, come along, Godard.

Godard

De Rimonville.

Gertrude (aside)

If they go away, fortune will favor me indeed.

Vernon (who has overheard her, aside)

Fortune, in this case, is represented by me—

Sceneeleventh

Gertrude, Vernon, Pauline, and later Marguerite.



Gertrude

Doctor, would you like another cup of tea?

Vernon

Thank you, but I am so deep in the election returns that I have not yet finished my first cup.

Gertrude (pointing to Pauline)

Poor child, you see she is sleeping?

Vernon

How is this? She is sleeping?

Gertrude

It is no wonder. Imagine, doctor, she did not go to sleep until three o'clock in this morning. We were greatly disturbed last night.



Page 29

Vernon

Let me assist you to carry her to her room.

Gertrude

It is not necessary. Marguerite, help me put this poor child to bed.
She will be more comfortable there.

(Marguerite comes forward and assists Gertrude to carry Pauline away.)

Scenetwelfth

Vernon, Felix (who enters at this juncture) and Marguerite later.

Vernon

Felix!

Felix

Is there anything I can do for you, sir?

Vernon

Is there a closet anywhere here in which I can lock up something?

Felix (pointing to the closet)

Here is a place, sir.

Vernon

Good! Felix, don't say a word of this to a single soul. (Aside) He will be sure to remember it. (Aloud) I am playing a trick on the General, and the trick will fail if you say anything.

Felix

I will be as dumb as a fish.

(The doctor takes from him the key of the closet.)

Vernon

And now leave me alone with your mistress, who is coming back here, and be on the watch that no one interrupts us for a moment.

Felix (going out)

Marguerite was right; there is something in the wind, that's certain.

Marguerite (returning)

There is nothing the matter. Mademoiselle is sleeping quietly.



(Exit Marguerite.)

Scenethirteenth

Vernon (alone) What can have set by the ears two women who have hitherto lived in peace? All doctors, little though they be philosophers, can tell. The poor General, who all his life has had no other idea excepting that of escaping the common lot! Yet I see no one here likely to cause him jealousy, but myself and Ferdinand. It is not probable that I am the man; but Ferdinand—Yet I have so far noticed nothing—I hear her coming! Now for the tug-of-war!

SceneFourteenth

Vernon and Gertrude.

Gertrude (aside)

I have them!—I am going to burn them in my chamber. (She meets Vernon.) Ah!

Vernon

Madame, I have sent everybody away.

Gertrude

May I ask you why?

Vernon

In order that we may have our explanation without witnesses.

Gertrude

Explanation! By what right do you—you, the parasite of the house, pretend to have an explanation with the Comtesse de Grandchamp?

Vernon I, a parasite? Madame! I have an income of ten thousand francs, besides my pension; I have the rank of general, and my fortune will be bequeathed to the children of my old friend! A parasite indeed! You forget that I am not only here as a friend but as a doctor, and—you poured certain drops of laudanum into Pauline's tea.

Gertrude

I?

Vernon

I saw you do it, and I have the cup.

Gertrude

You have the cup? Why, I washed it myself!

Vernon

Yes, you washed mine, which I gave you in exchange for that of Pauline! I was not reading the newspaper, I was watching you.



Page 30

Gertrude
Oh! sir, how unworthy of you!

Vernon You must confess that what I did then is of great service to you, for if you had by the effect of that draught brought Pauline to the brink of the grave, you would have been very glad of my services.

Gertrude
The brink of the grave—why, doctor, I put in only a very few drops.

Vernon
You admit, then, that you put opium in her tea?

Gertrude
Doctor—this is outrageous!

Vernon
That I have obtained a confession from you? Every woman under the same circumstances would have said the same thing. I know it by experience. But that is not all. You have several others things to confide in me.

Gertrude (aside)
He is a spy! The only thing I can do is to make him my accomplice.
(Aloud) Doctor, you are too useful to me to admit of our quarreling.
In a moment, if you will wait here, I will return and speak frankly to you.

(Gertrude goes into her chamber and locks the door.)

Vernon She has turned the key! I am caught, tricked! I cannot after all resort to violence. What is she doing? She is going to hide her flask of opium. A man is always wrong when he undertakes to discharge for a friend the offices which my old friend, this poor General, expects of me. She is going to entangle me—Ah! Here she comes.

Gertrude (aside)
I have burnt them! There is not a trace left—I am saved! (Aloud)
Doctor!

Vernon
Madame?

Gertrude My stepdaughter Pauline, whom you believed to be an innocent girl, an angel, had carried off furtively and criminally something whose discovery would have compromised the honor and the life of four persons.



Vernon

Four! (Aside) That is herself, the General—Ah! her son, perhaps—and the unknown.

Gertrude

This secret, concerning which she is forced to keep silence, even though it imperilled her life to do so—

Vernon

I don't quite catch your meaning.

Gertrude In short, the proofs of this secret are now destroyed! And you, doctor, who love us all, you would be as base, as infamous as she is—even more so, because you are a man, and have not the insensate passions of a woman!—You would be a monster if you were to take another step along the path on which you have now started—

Vernon You mean that for intimidation? Madame, since civilized society first sprang into being, the seed which you are sowing has produced a crop whose name is crime.

Gertrude But there are four lives at stake; remember that. (Aside) He is giving way. (Aloud) In spite of this danger I demand that you will assist me in maintaining peace here, and that you will immediately go and get something by which Pauline may be roused from her slumber. And you will explain, if necessary, her drowsiness to the General. Further, you will give me back the cup, for I am sure you intend to do so, and each step that we take together in this affair shall be fully explained to you.



Page 31

Vernon
Madame!

Gertrude
We must separate now, for the General will soon be back.

Vernon (aside)
I shall still look after you! I have now a weapon that I can use and—

(Exit Vernon.)

Scenefifteenth

Gertrude (alone, leaning against the closet in which the cup is locked up) Where can he have hidden that cup?

Curtain to the Third Act.

ActIV

Scenefirst

(Pauline's chamber.)

Gertrude and Pauline (the latter sleeping on a large armchair on the left).

Gertrude (cautiously entering) She is sleeping, and the doctor said that she would wake up at once. Her slumber alarms me. This then is the girl that he is in love with. I do not find her pretty at all. Oh, yes, after all, she is beautiful! But how is it that men do not see that beauty is nothing but a promise, and that love is the—(someone knocks). How is this; there are people coming.

Vernon (outside)
May I come in, Pauline?

Gertrude
It is the doctor.

Scenessecond

The same persons and Vernon.

Gertrude
You told me that she would soon awake.



Vernon

Don't be alarmed. (Calling aloud) Pauline! Pauline!

Pauline (awakening)

O M. Vernon! Where am I? Ah! In my own room. What has happened to me?

Vernon My child, you fell asleep while you were taking your tea. Madame de Grandchamp feared as I did that this was the beginning of a sickness; but it is no such thing. It is altogether, as it seems to me, the consequence of a night without sleep.

Gertrude

And now, Pauline, how do you feel?

Pauline

I have been sleeping—and madame was here while I slept! (She starts up; puts her hand upon her bosom.) Ah! It is outrageous! (To Vernon) Doctor, can you have been an accomplice?

Gertrude

An accomplice in what? What were you going to say?

Vernon

! my child! Could you suppose that I was the accomplice of an evil action wrought against you, whom I love as if you were my daughter? Don't speak of such a thing as that! But come, tell me?

Pauline

There is nothing, doctor, nothing to say!

Gertrude

Let me speak a few words to her.

Vernon (aside)

What possible motive can there be for a young child to keep silence, when she is the victim of such an act of treachery as this?

Gertrude (in a low voice to Pauline) So you see, Pauline, you didn't long keep in your possession the proofs which you intended taking to your father in your ridiculous accusation of me!

Pauline

I understand all; you gave me a narcotic in order to deprive me of them.

Gertrude

We are equally inquisitive. I have done to you what you did to me in Ferdinand's apartments.



Page 32

Pauline

You are triumphant now, madame, but it will soon be my turn.

Gertrude

The war, then, is to continue?

Pauline

War, madame? Call it a duel! One or the other of us must go.

Gertrude

You are tragic.

Vernon (aside) There appears to be no outbreak between them, nor the least misunderstanding!—But stay, an idea strikes me; suppose I go and look for Ferdinand?

(Vernon prepares to go out.)

Gertrude

Doctor!

Vernon

Madame?

Gertrude

We must have a talk together. (Whispering) I shall not leave you until you have given me back—

Vernon

I stated to you the sole condition—

Pauline

Doctor!

Vernon (going to her)

My child?

Pauline

Are you aware that my sleep just now was not a natural one?

Vernon

Yes, you were put to sleep by your stepmother. I have proof of it. But do you know the reason why?

Pauline

Oh! doctor, it is—



Gertrude
Doctor!

Pauline
Later on, I will tell you all.

Vernon
Already from each of them I have learned something of what lies
beneath. Ah! poor General!

Gertrude
I am waiting, doctor.

(Vernon bows and escorts Gertrude out.)

Scenethird

Pauline (alone; she rings) Yes, the only alternative left me is to flee with him; if we continue this conflict, my stepmother and I, it can but result in my father's dishonor. Would it not be better to disobey him? Then I will write to him—I will be generous, because, my triumph over her will be complete—I will let my father still believe in her, and will explain my flight by attributing it to the hatred which he bears to the name of Marcandal and to my love for Ferdinand.

Scenefourth

Pauline and Marguerite.

Marguerite
Does mademoiselle feel well again?

Pauline
Yes, I am well enough in body; but in mind—Oh, I am in despair! My poor Marguerite, unfortunate is the girl who has lost her mother—

Marguerite And whose father has for his second wife such a woman as Madame de Grandchamp. But tell me, mademoiselle, am I not to you a humble and devoted mother? My affection for you as a nurse has grown in proportion to the hate with which this stepmother regards you.

Pauline
Yes, Marguerite, you may believe it, but you delude yourself. Your love can never be as great as her hatred.

Marguerite
Oh! mademoiselle! If you would only put me to the proof!



Pauline
Really?—Would you leave France for me?

Marguerite
To be with you, I would travel to the Indies.

Pauline
And would you start at once?

Marguerite
At once!—My baggage is not heavy.

Pauline
Well, Marguerite, we will start to-night, and secretly.



Page 33

Marguerite
But why is this?

Pauline
You ask me why? Do you not know that Madame de Grandchamp put me to sleep with opium?

Marguerite I know it, mademoiselle, and Doctor Vernon knows it also, for Felix told me that he put under lock and key your teacup.—But why did she do it?

Pauline Say not a word about it, if you love me! And if you are as devoted to me as you profess to be, go to your room and gather together all that you possess, so quietly that none shall suspect that you are preparing for a journey. We will start after midnight. You must now take from me here, and carry to your room, my jewels and all that I shall need for a long journey. Use the utmost caution; for if my stepmother had the least idea of what we are doing, I should be ruined.

Marguerite
Ruined!—But, mademoiselle, what is come over you? Think seriously before you leave your home.

Pauline
Do you wish to see me die?

Marguerite
Die!—Oh, mademoiselle, I will at once obey your wishes.

Pauline
Marguerite, tell M. Ferdinand to bring me my year's allowance; bid him come this moment.

Marguerite
He was under your windows when I came in.

Pauline (aside)
Under my windows!—doubtless he thought that he would never see me again.—Poor Ferdinand!

(Exit Marguerite.)

Scenefifth

Pauline (alone) When I think of leaving my father's house, it at once comes home to me that my father will seek me many a day, far and wide. With what treasures love ought to repay me, for such sacrifices, for I abandon to follow Ferdinand my country, my father,



and my home! But at any rate, this shameless woman will lose him without hope of restoration! Moreover, I shall return! The doctor and M. Ramel will win for me forgiveness from my father. I think I hear the step of Ferdinand! —Yes, it is actually he!

Scenesixth

Pauline and Ferdinand.

Pauline

Oh, my love, my Ferdinand!

Ferdinand

And I thought that I should never see you again! Marguerite, I see, knows all.

Pauline

She knows nothing yet; but this night she shall learn of our flight, for we shall be free; and you shall take your wife with you.

Ferdinand

Oh, Pauline, do not deceive me!

Pauline I was making arrangements to rejoin you in your place of exile; but this odious woman has hurried on my resolution. There is no merit in what I am doing, it is a question of life and death to me.

Ferdinand

Of life and death! Tell me what has she been doing?

Pauline She almost poisoned me; she drugged me, in order to take the letters I carried about me! By what she has dared to do, in order to keep you for herself, I judge what she yet may do. If therefore we wish to be united, our only hope lies in flight. Therefore let us not say farewell! This night we must find some refuge or other—But where? That lies with you.

Page 34

Ferdinand

Ah! These words,—how wild with joy they make me!

Pauline Ferdinand! Take every precaution; hurry to Louviers, go to the house of your friend, the prosecuting attorney; secure our passports, and a carriage with fast horses. I fear that my father, urged on by this stepmother, may try to overtake us! May he fail to do so; he would kill us, for I am telling him in this letter the fatal secret of your birth which compels me thus to leave him.

Ferdinand Dismiss your fears. Eugene completed his preparations for my departure yesterday. Here is the sum of money which your father owed me. (He shows her a pocket-book.) Give me your receipt. (He puts down some money on the table.) I have only to give in my balance sheet in order to be free. We shall reach Rouen in three hours, and at Havre we shall take an American ship. Eugene has sent a trusty man to secure me a passage on board. The officers of the vessel will think it only natural that a man should take his wife abroad with him, so we shall meet with no obstacle—

Sceneseventh

The same persons and Gertrude.

Gertrude

Excepting me.

Pauline

We are lost!

Gertrude

So you are going to start without telling me, Ferdinand? Oh, indeed!

But I have heard it all.

Ferdinand (to Pauline) Mademoiselle, have the goodness to give me your receipt, it is indispensable in completing the account which I must give to your father before leaving. (To Gertrude) Madame, you may be able, perhaps, to prevent mademoiselle from going away; but I can no longer remain here, and I must absolutely start to-night.

Gertrude

You must stay here, and you shall stay here, sir!

Ferdinand

Against my will?

Gertrude What mademoiselle wishes to do, I myself will do, and without fear. I will make M. de Grandchamp come into this very room, and you will at once see that he will



compel you to leave, but—with me and my child. (Felix appears.) Beg M. de Grandchamp to come here.

Ferdinand (to Pauline) I see her object. Detain her here, while I overtake Felix, and prevent him from speaking to the General! Eugene will tell you how you must act after my departure. When once we have left this place, Gertrude will be powerless to oppose us. (To Gertrude) Farewell, madame. You lately made an attack on Pauline's life, and by this act have broken the last ties that bound me to your friendship.

Gertrude

You have nothing but accusations for me! But you do not know what mademoiselle intended telling her father concerning you and me.

Ferdinand I love her, and will love her all my life; I shall be able to defend her against you, and I prize her high enough to suffer banishment in order to obtain her. Farewell.

Pauline

Dear, dear Ferdinand!

Scene eighth

Gertrude and Pauline.

Page 35

Gertrude

Now that we are alone, do you know why I have summoned your father? It is in order to tell him the name and family of Ferdinand.

Pauline Madame, what are you going to do? My father, as soon as he learns that the son of General Marcandal has won the love of his daughter, will get to Havre as quickly as Ferdinand does. He will come up with him, and then—

Gertrude I would sooner see Ferdinand dead than united to any one but myself, especially when I feel in my heart as much hatred for that other one as I have love for him. Such is my final word in our mortal duel.

Pauline Madame, I am now at your feet, as you but now were at mine. Let us slay each other if you like, but let us not murder him! Let his life be spared, though it be at the cost of mine!

Gertrude

Will you give him up?

Pauline

I will, madame.

Gertrude (she lets her handkerchief fall in the excitement of her passionate speech) You are deceiving me! You tell me this, because he loves you, because he has already insulted me by avowing it, and because you believe that he will not love me any longer. Now this will not do, Pauline, you must give me some pledge of your sincerity.

Pauline (aside) Her handkerchief! Ah! I see with it the key of her desk. It is there that the poison is locked up! (Aloud) Did you say pledges of my sincerity? I will give them to you. What do you demand?

Gertrude Really, I do not care for more than one proof that you mean what you say, and that is, that you should marry the other suitor.

Pauline

I will marry him.

Gertrude

And you must, at this very moment, plight your troth with him.

Pauline

Go to him yourself, madame, and tell him; and then come here with my father, and—



Gertrude
And what?

Pauline
And I will give him my word; even though this be to give away my life.

Gertrude (aside) In what a tone she uttered that. With what resolution! And without tears—I feel sure she is keeping something back! (Aloud) And so you are quite resigned to this?

Pauline
I am.

Gertrude (aside)
I hope she is. (To Pauline) If you are sincere—

Pauline
You are mendacity itself, and you always see a lie in other's words—Oh! Leave me, madame, you make me shudder.

Gertrude (aside) Well, she is candid at any rate. (Aloud) I am going to tell Ferdinand of your resolution—(Pauline nods in acquiescence.) But he will not believe me. Suppose you write a word to him?

Pauline
Yes, I will write to him, and tell him not to go away. (Sits down and writes.) Here is the letter, madame.

Gertrude (reads) "I am going to marry M. de Rimonville—so that you may remain here. Pauline." (Aside) I do not quite understand this—I fear that there is some trick in it. I am going to let him leave; he will learn of the marriage when he is far away from this.



Page 36

(Exit Gertrude.)

Sceneninth

Pauline (alone) Ferdinand is utterly lost to me now—I have always expected it; the world is either a paradise or a prison cell; and I, a young girl, have dreamed only of the paradise. But anyway I have the key of the desk, and I can return it after having taken out something which may serve to put an end to this terrible situation. Yes, that is what I will do!

Scenetenth

Pauline and Marguerite.

Marguerite

Mademoiselle, my trunks are all packed. I am now going to begin packing here.

Pauline

Yes. (Aside) It is best to let her do so. (Aloud) Come here, Marguerite, take this gold and conceal it among your things.

Marguerite

You are sure that your reasons for starting away are very urgent?

Pauline

My poor Marguerite, who knows whether I shall be able to get away! But come, go on with your work.

(Exit Pauline.)

Sceneeleventh

Marguerite (alone) And to think that I believed this fury was unwilling that mademoiselle should marry! Is it possible that mademoiselle should have concealed from me that her real love was being opposed? Yet her father is so good to her! He leaves her free to choose—Suppose I were to speak to the General—Oh! no, I would not run the risk of injuring my child.

Scenetwelfth

Marguerite and Pauline.

Pauline No one has seen me. Listen, Marguerite, first of all, take away the money that I gave you, and then let me think about the resolution which I have taken.



Marguerite

If I were in your place, mademoiselle, I would tell everything to the General.

Pauline

To my father? Unhappy woman, do not betray me! And let both of us respect the illusions, in the midst of which he lives.

Marguerite

Ah! Illusions! That is the very word.

Pauline

You may leave me now.

(Exit Marguerite.)

Scenethirteenth

Pauline, then Vernon.

Pauline (holding in her hand the parcel of poison, which was shown in the first act) Here stands death before me! The doctor told us yesterday, in reference to Champagne's wife, that this terrible substance required some hours, almost a whole night, to produce its deadly effects, and that it was possible, during the first hours, to nullify these effects; if the doctor remains at the house, he will provide this antidote.

(Some one knocks.)

Vernon (from without)

It is I.

Pauline

Come in, doctor! (Aside) Curiosity brings him to see me, curiosity will take him away.

Vernon

I see, my child, that between you and your stepmother, there are secrets of life and death?

Pauline

Yes, and, above all, death.

Vernon

I was afraid so! And that, of course, I must attend to. But tell me—You must have had some terrible quarrel with your stepmother.



Page 37

Pauline

Let me hear no more of that creature. She deceives my father.

Vernon

I know it.

Pauline

She never loved him.

Vernon

I was quite sure of that!

Pauline

She has sworn to ruin me.

Vernon

How? Is it in an affair of your heart that she wishes to do you harm?

Pauline

Rather say, it is my life she threatens.

Vernon

What a horrible suspicion! Pauline, my child, I love you well, you know I do. Tell me, can nothing save you?

Pauline

In order to change my fate, it would be necessary that my father change his ideas. Listen; I am in love with M. Ferdinand.

Vernon

I already know that. But who would hinder you from marrying him?

Pauline

Can you keep a secret? Well, he is the son of General Marcandal!

Vernon My God! You may rely on my keeping that secret! Why, your father would fight with him to the death, if for nothing else, because he has had him under his roof for three years.

Pauline

You will then see very plainly that there is no hope for me.

(Pauline sinks back overwhelmed with emotion in an armchair.)



Vernon

Poor child! I fear she is going to faint. (He rings and calls)

Marguerite! Marguerite!

Scene Fourteenth

The same persons, Gertrude, Marguerite and the General.

Marguerite (running in)

What is it, sir?

Vernon

Get me a tea-urn of boiling water, into which you must drop some orange leaves.

(Exit Marguerite.)

Gertrude

What is the matter with you, Pauline?

The General

Dear child, do tell us?

Gertrude

Oh, it is nothing! We can understand her feelings. It is because she sees her lot in life decided—

Vernon (to the General)

Her lot decided? And in what way?

The General She is going to marry Godard! (Aside) It seems to me as if she were giving up some love affair of which she did not wish to tell me. As far as I can understand from what my wife has told me, the unknown one is ineligible, and Pauline did not discover his unworthiness until yesterday.

Vernon And you believe this? Do not precipitate matters, General. We will talk it over this evening. (Aside) Before then I am going to have a few words with Madame de Grandchamp.

Pauline (to Gertrude)

The doctor knows all!

Gertrude

Ah!

Pauline (she puts back into the pocket of Gertrude the handkerchief and the key, while the latter is looking at Vernon, who converses with the General) Keep him away, for he is capable of telling all he knows to the General. We must at least protect Ferdinand.



Gertrude (aside) She is right. (Aloud) Doctor, I have just been informed that Francis, one of our best workmen, is sick; he hasn't appeared this morning, and you might go and visit him.



Page 38

The General
Francis? Oh! Vernon, you had better go and see him—

Vernon
Doesn't he live at Pre-l'Eveque? (Aside) More than three leagues away.

The General
Are you alarmed about Pauline?

Vernon
It is simply an attack of nerves.

Gertrude
I can take your place here, doctor, if that is so, can't I?

Vernon Yes. (To the General) I'll undertake to say that Francis is about as sick as I am!
The fact of it is, I see rather too much and my presence is not desired—

The General (in a rage)
What are you talking about? To whom do you refer?

Vernon
Are you going to fly into a passion again? Do calm yourself, my old friend, or you will cause yourself eternal remorse.

The General
Remorse?

Vernon
Just keep these people talking, till I return.

The General
But—

Gertrude (to Pauline)
Tell me, how do you feel now, my sweet angel?

The General
Just look at them.

Vernon
Ah! Well, women stab each other with a smile and a kiss.

Scenefifteenth



The same persons (except Vernon) and Marguerite.

Gertrude (to the General, who seems as if he were bewildered by the last words of Vernon) What is the matter with you?

The General (passing before Gertrude to the side of Pauline)
Nothing, nothing! Tell me, my little Pauline, is your engagement with Godard to be quite voluntary?

Pauline
Quite voluntary.

Gertrude (aside)
Ah!

The General
He will be here soon.

Pauline
I am expecting him.

The General (aside)
There is a tremendous amount of bitterness in her tone.

(Marguerite appears with a tea-cup.)

Gertrude
It is too soon, Marguerite, the infusion can't yet be strong enough!
(She tastes it.) I must go and prepare it myself.

Marguerite
I have always been in the habit of waiting upon *Mlle.* Pauline.

Gertrude
What do you mean by speaking to me in this tone?

Marguerite
But—madame—

The General
Marguerite, if you say another word, we shall fall out.

Pauline
Marguerite, you may just as well let Madame de Grandchamp have her way.

(Gertrude goes out with Marguerite.)



The General And so my little girl has not much confidence in the father who loves her so? Come now! Tell me why you so distinctly refused Godard yesterday, and yet, accept him to-day?

Pauline

I suppose it is a young girl's whim.

The General

Are you in love with anybody else?

Pauline

It is because I am not in love with anybody else that I consent to marry your friend M. Godard!

(Gertrude comes in with Marguerite.)

The General

Ah!

Gertrude

Take this, my darling, but be careful, for it is a little hot.



Page 39

Pauline
Thank you, mother!

The General
Mother! Truly, this is enough to drive one crazy with perplexity!

Pauline
Marguerite, bring me the sugar basin!

(While Marguerite goes out and Gertrude talks with the General, Pauline drops the poison into the cup and lets fall the paper which contained it.)

Gertrude (to the General)
You seem to be indisposed?

The General
My dear, I cannot understand women; I am like Godard.

(Marguerite comes back.)

Gertrude
You are like all other men.

Pauline (hurriedly drinking the poisoned cup)
Ah!

Gertrude
How are you now, my child?

Pauline
I am better.

Gertrude
I am going to prepare another cup for you.

Pauline
Oh, no, madame, this will be quite enough! I would sooner wait for the doctor.

(Pauline sets down the empty cup on the table.)

Scenesixteenth

The same persons and Felix, then Godard.



Felix (looking inquiringly at Pauline)
M. Godard asks if you will see him?

Pauline
Certainly.

Gertrude (leaving the room)
What do you intend saying to him.

Pauline
Wait and see.

Godard (entering) I am sorry that mademoiselle is indisposed. I did not know it. I will not intrude. (They offer him a chair.) Mademoiselle, allow me to thank you above all for the kindness you have shown in receiving me in this sanctuary of innocence. Madame de Grandchamp and your father have just informed me of something which would have overwhelmed me with happiness yesterday, but rather astonishes me to-day.

The General
That is to say, M. Godard—

Pauline
Do not be hasty, father, M. Godard is right. You do not know all I said to him yesterday.

Godard You are far too clever, mademoiselle, not to consider as quite natural the curiosity of an honorable young man, who has an income of forty thousand francs, besides his savings, to learn of the reason why he should be accepted after a lapse of twenty-four hours from his rejection—For, yesterday, it was at this very hour—(He pulls out his watch) Half-past five—

The General What do you mean by all this? It looks as if you are not as much in love as you said you were. You have come here to complain of a charming girl at the very moment when she has told you—

Godard
I would not complain, if the subject were not marriage. Marriage, General, is at once the cause and the effect of sentiment.

The General
Pardon me, Godard, I am a little hasty, as you know.

Pauline (to Godard)
Sir—(Aside) Oh, how I suffer! (Aloud) Sir, why should poor young girls—



Godard

Poor? No, no, mademoiselle; you are not poor. You have four hundred thousand francs.

Pauline

Why should weak young girls—

Page 40

Godard
Weak?

Pauline Well, then, innocent young persons—be so very fastidious about the character of the man who presents himself as their lord and master? If you love me, will you punish yourself—will you punish me—because your love has been submitted to a test?

Godard
Of course, from that point of view—

The General
Oh! These women! These women!

Godard
You may just as well say, “These daughters.”

The General
Yes, for I am quite sure that mine has more brains than I have.

Sceneseventeenth

The same persons, Gertrude and then Napoleon.

Gertrude
How has it turned out, M. Godard?

Godard
Ah, Madame! General! My happiness is complete, and my dream fulfilled. For now I am to be admitted into a family like yours. To think that I—Ah! Madame! General! (Aside) I’d like to find out the mystery, for she has precious little love for me.

Napoleon (entering)
Papa, I have won the school medal—Good-day, mamma—and where is Pauline? And so you are sick? Poor little sister! I’ll tell you something—I have found out where justice comes from.

Gertrude
And who told you? Ah! see what a lovely boy he is!

Napoleon
The master told me that justice comes from God.

Godard
It is very plain that your master was not born in Normandy.



Pauline (in a low voice to Marguerite)
O Marguerite! Dear Marguerite! Do send them all away.

Marguerite
Gentlemen, *Mlle.* Pauline desires to take a little nap.

The General
Just so, Pauline, we will leave you, and you need not get up till dinner time.

Pauline
I will certainly get up then if I can. Father, kiss me before you go.

The General (kissing her)
My darling child! (To Napoleon) Come, my boy.

(They all go out, except Pauline, Marguerite and Napoleon.)

Napoleon (to Pauline)
And how is it you do not kiss me? Tell me what ails you?

Pauline
Oh! I am dying!

Napoleon
Do people die? Pauline, what is death made of?

Pauline
Death—is made—like this—

(Pauline falls back into Marguerite's arms.)

Marguerite
Oh! My God! Help! Help!

Napoleon
Oh! Pauline, you frighten me! (Running away.) Mamma! Mamma!

Curtain to the Fourth Act.

Act V

Scene first

(The chamber of Pauline as before.)

Pauline, Ferdinand and Vernon.

(Pauline lies stretched upon her bed. Ferdinand holds her hand in an attitude of profound grief and despair. It is just before dawn and a lamp is burning.)

Page 41

Vernon (seated near the table) I have seen thousands of dead men on the field of battle and in the ambulances, yet the death of this young girl under her father's roof moves me more profoundly than all those heroic sufferings. Death is perhaps a thing foreseen on the field of battle—it is even expected there; while here, it is not only the passing away of a single person, but a whole family is plunged in tears and fond hopes vanish. Here is this child, of whom I was so fond, murdered, poisoned—and by whom? Marguerite has rightly guessed the secret of this struggle between two rivals. It was impossible to refrain from communicating at once with the authorities. In the meantime, God knows I have used every effort to snatch this young life from the grave. (Ferdinand raises his head and listens to the doctor) I have even brought this poison, which may act as an antidote to the other; but the princes of medical science should have been present to witness the experiment! No man ought to venture upon such a throw of the dice.

Ferdinand (rises and approaches the doctor) Doctor, when the magistrates arrive, will you explain this experiment of yours; they will be sure to sanction it; and you may be sure that God, yes God, will hear me. He will work some miracle, He will give her back to me!

Vernon I should have ventured upon it before the action of the poison had wrought its full effects. If I did so now, I should be looked upon as the poisoner. No (he places a little flask upon the table), it would be useless now, and to give it with the most disinterested motives would be looked upon as a crime.

Ferdinand (after holding a mirror before Pauline's lips) Anything, everything is yet possible; she still breathes.

Vernon
She will not live till daylight.

Pauline
Ferdinand!

Ferdinand
She has just uttered my name.

Vernon The vitality of a girl of twenty-two is very tenacious! Moreover, she will preserve consciousness, even to her last gasp. She might possibly rise from her bed and talk with us, although the sufferings caused by this terrible poison are inconceivable.

Scenesecound

The same persons and the General.

The General (outside)
Vernon!



Vernon (to Ferdinand) It is the General. (Ferdinand, overcome with grief, falls back on the armchair, where he is concealed by the curtains of the bed.) What do you want?

The General
I want to see Pauline!

Vernon
If you take my advice, you will wait awhile; she is very much worse.

The General (entering)
For that reason I shall come in.

Vernon
Do not come in, General. Listen to me!

The General
No, no! Ah, how motionless, how cold she is, Vernon!

Vernon
Listen! General! (Aside) We must get him away somehow. (Aloud) There is but a faint hope of saving her.



Page 42

The General

You told me—You must have been deceiving me!

Vernon My friend, we have to look this catastrophe in the face, as we had to look towards the batteries through a shower of bullets! On such occasions, when I hesitated, you always went forward. (Aside) That is a good idea! (Aloud) You had better bring to her the consolations of religion.

The General

Vernon, I wish to see her, to give her my last kiss.

Vernon

Be careful!

The General (kissing her)

Oh! How icy cold she is!

Vernon That is a peculiarity of her sickness, General. Hurry to the priest's house, for in case my remedies fail, it is not right that your daughter, who has been reared as a Christian, should be forgotten by the Church.

The General

Ah! yes. I will go.

(The General moves towards the bed.)

Vernon (pointing towards the door)

This way!

The General I quite lose my head; I am distracted—O Vernon, work a miracle for us! You have saved so many people—and here you cannot save the life of my child!

Vernon

Come, come, be off. (Aside) I must go with him, for if he meets the magistrates there will be more trouble still.

(Exit the General and Vernon.)

Scenethird

Pauline and Ferdinand.

Pauline

Ferdinand!



Ferdinand Ah! My God! Can this be her last sigh? Pauline, you are my very life; if Vernon does not save you, I will follow you, and we shall still be united.

Pauline
I shall expire, then, without a single regret.

Ferdinand (takes up the flask)
That which would have saved you, if the doctor had arrived earlier, shall deliver me from life.

Pauline
No, for you may still be happy.

Ferdinand
Never, without you.

Pauline
Your words revive me.

Scenefourth

The same persons and Vernon.

Ferdinand
She speaks; her eyes once more are open.

Vernon
Poor child! There she falls asleep again. What shall the waking be?

(Ferdinand sits down again and takes the hand of Pauline.)

Scenefifth

The same persons, Ramel, the Investigating Magistrate, a Doctor, a Corporal of Police and Marguerite.

Marguerite
M. Vernon, the magistrates are here. M. Ferdinand, you must leave the room.

(Exit Ferdinand.)

Ramel Take care, corporal, that all the entrances of this house are guarded, and observe our orders! Doctor, can we remain here a few moments without danger to the sick lady?

Vernon
She is asleep, sir; and it is her last slumber.



Marguerite

Here is the cup into which the infusion was poured and which still has traces of arsenic; I perceived it there as soon as I took hold of it.

The Doctor (examining the cup and tasting the contents)

It is evident that the liquid contains some poisonous substance.



Page 43

The Magistrate

Please to make an analysis of it. (He sees Marguerite picking up a small piece of paper from the ground.) What paper is that?

Marguerite

Oh, it is nothing.

Ramel In such cases as these, nothing is insignificant in the eyes of magistrates! Yes, gentlemen, we shall have to examine this paper later. What can have delayed M. de Grandchamp?

Vernon

He is at the priest's house, but he will not stay there long.

The Magistrate (to the doctor)

Have you made your examination yet, sir?

(The two physicians converse together at the head of the bed.)

Ramel (to the magistrate)

If the General returns, we must deal with him according to the circumstances.

(Marguerite is weeping, kneeling at the foot of the bed; the two physicians, the judge and Ramel are grouped in the front of the stage.)

Ramel (to the doctor)

It is therefore of your opinion, sir, that the illness of *Mlle.* de Grandchamp, whom we saw two days ago full of health, and even of happiness, is the result of a crime?

The Doctor

The symptoms of poisoning are undeniable.

Ramel And are the remains of the poison contained in this cup so discernible, and present in such a quantity, as to furnish legal proof?

The Doctor

Yes, sir.

The Magistrate (to Vernon) This woman alleges, sir, that yesterday, at four o'clock, you prescribed for *Mlle.* de Grandchamp an infusion of orange leaves, as a soothing draught for the nervous excitement which followed upon an interview between the stepmother and her stepdaughter; she says, moreover, that Madame de Grandchamp, who had



despatched you on an empty errand to a place four leagues away, had insisted upon preparing and giving everything to her daughter herself; is this true?

Vernon
Yes, sir.

Marguerite
When I persisted in my purpose of attending myself upon my young mistress, my poor master was incensed to the point of reproaching me.

Ramel (to Vernon)
Where did Madame de Grandchamp send you?

Vernon Everything is ominous in this mysterious affair. Madame de Grandchamp was so anxious to get me out of the way that she sent me three leagues to visit a sick man, who, I found when I reached his home, was drinking in the inn. I blamed Champagne for deceiving Madame de Grandchamp, and Champagne positively told me that the workman had not appeared at the factory, but that he himself knows nothing about his alleged sickness.

Felix
Gentlemen, the clergy are here.

Ramel
We can continue our proceedings in the drawing-room.

Vernon
This way, gentlemen, this way.

(Scene curtain.)

Scene sixth

(The drawing-room.)

Ramel, the Magistrate, the Sheriff's Officer and Vernon.

Page 44

Ramel Here, then, is the result so far of our inquiry, in accordance with the evidence of Felix and Marguerite. Madame de Grandchamp, in the first place, administered to her stepdaughter a dose of opium, and you, M. Vernon, who were present and saw the criminal attempt, managed to secure and lock up the cup.

Vernon
It is true, gentlemen, but—

Ramel How is it, M. Vernon, that when you witnessed this criminal attempt, you did not check Madame de Grandchamp in the fatal course which she was then pursuing?

Vernon Believe me, gentlemen, I did everything which I thought could be done with prudence, and all that my long experience suggested was attempted by me.

The Magistrate Your conduct, sir, was peculiar, and you will be called upon to explain it. You did your duty yesterday in preserving the cup as evidence; but why did you not go further?

Ramel Pardon me, M. Cordier, this gentleman is advanced in years; he is an honest and trustworthy man. (He takes Vernon aside) You have found out, I suppose, the cause of this crime.

Vernon It springs from a rivalry between two women, who have been urged on to the most violent extremes by their reckless passions. And I was obliged to keep silence on the subject.

Ramel
I know the whole business.

Vernon
You! sir?

Ramel Yes, and, like you, I have done everything to prevent this catastrophe; for Ferdinand was to leave this very night. I knew *Mlle.* Gertrude de Meilhac in former years, having met her at the house of my friend.

Vernon Oh! sir, show clemency! Have pity on an old soldier, crippled with wounds, and enslaved by delusions. He is in danger of losing both his daughter and his wife. Heaven grant he may not lose his honor also!

Ramel We understand each other. So long as Gertrude does not make such admissions as force us to see the real situation, I shall endeavor to persuade the investigating magistrate—who is an extremely sagacious and honest man of ten years' experience—I shall try to make him believe that cupidity alone has influenced Madame de Grandchamp. You must assist me. (The magistrate approaches; Ramel nods to

Vernon and puts on an expression of severity.) Why did Madame de Grandchamp wish to drug her stepdaughter? You, who are the friend of the household, ought to know this.

Vernon Pauline was about to confide her secrets to me. Her stepmother thought that I was learning certain things which her interest required should be concealed; and that, sir, is doubtless the reason why she sent me to treat a workman who was in good health, and not to prevent help from being brought to Pauline, for Louviers is not so far off.

The Magistrate What forethought she has! She won't be able to escape if we find the proofs of crime in her desk. She does not expect us here; she will be thunderstruck.

Sceneseventh

The same persons, Gertrude and Marguerite.



Page 45

Gertrude I hear the strains of church music! What, is there another trial going on here? What can be happening? (She goes to the door of Pauline's chamber and starts back terrified, on the appearance of Marguerite.) Ah!

Marguerite

They are offering prayers over the body of your victim!

Gertrude

Pauline! Pauline! Dead!

The Magistrate

And it is you, madame, who have poisoned her.

Gertrude II II Ah! what is this? Am I asleep or awake? (To Ramel) Ah! How extremely fortunate for me in this meeting! For you know the whole affair, don't you? Do you believe me capable of a crime like this? What! Am I actually accused of it? Do you think that I would have made an attack upon her life? I, the mother of a child, before whom I would not wish to be disgraced? Justice will vindicate me—Marguerite, let no one leave the room. Gentlemen, tell me what has taken place since yesterday evening, when I left Pauline slightly indisposed?

The Magistrate

Madame, collect yourself! You stand before the tribunal of your country.

Gertrude

You chill me with such words—

The Magistrate The administration of justice in France is the most perfect of criminal procedures. No traps are set, for justice proceeds, acts, and speaks with open face, for she is solely intent upon her mission, which is, the discovery of the truth. At the present moment, you are merely inculpated, and in me you must see your protector. But tell the truth, whatever it may be; the final result will be decided at a higher tribunal.

Gertrude

Ah! sir, take me into her chamber, and in presence of Pauline I will cry out, what I cry out before you—I am guiltless of her death!

The Magistrate

Madame!

Gertrude Sir, let us have none of those long phrases, with which you blind the eyes of people. I suffer pains unheard of! I weep for Pauline as though she were my child, and—I forgive her everything! What do you want with me? Proceed, and I will answer you.



Ramel

What is it that you will forgive her?

Gertrude

I mean—

Ramel (in a low voice)

Be cautious in your replies.

Gertrude

You are right, for precipices yawn on every side!

The Magistrate (to the sheriff's officer) Names and titles may be taken later; now write down the notes of the investigation, and the inquiry. (To Gertrude) Did you yesterday forenoon put opium into the tea of *Mlle. de Grandchamp*?

Gertrude

Ah! doctor—this is you.

Ramel

Do not accuse the doctor. He has already too seriously compromised himself for you! Answer the magistrate!

Gertrude

It is true.

The Magistrate

Madame recognizes the cup and admits that she put opium in it. That will be enough for the present, at this stage of the inquiry.

Gertrude

Do you accuse me then of something further? What is it?



Page 46

The Magistrate Madame, if you cannot free yourself from blame with regard to a later event, you may be charged with the crime of poisoning. We must now proceed to seek proofs either of your innocence or of your guilt.

Gertrude
Where will you seek them?

The Magistrate
From you! Yesterday you gave *Mlle.* de Grandchamp an infusion of orange leaves, in another cup which contained arsenic.

Gertrude
Can it be possible!

The Magistrate
The day before yesterday you declared that the key of your desk, in which the arsenic was locked, never left your possession.

Gertrude
It is in my dress pocket.

The Magistrate
Have you ever made any use of that arsenic?

Gertrude
No; you will find the parcel still sealed.

Ramel
Ah! madame, I sincerely hope so.

The Magistrate
I very much doubt it; this is one of those audacious criminals—

Gertrude
The chamber is in disorder, permit me—

The Magistrate
No, no! All three of us will enter it.

Ramel
Your innocence is now at stake.

Gertrude
Gentlemen, let us go in together.



Scene eighth

Vernon (alone)

My poor General! He kneels by the bed of his daughter; he weeps, he prays! Alas! God alone can give her back to him.

Scene ninth

Vernon, Gertrude, Ramel, the Magistrate and the Sheriff's Officer.

Gertrude

I scarce can believe my senses; I am dreaming—I am—

Ramel

You are ruined, madame.

Gertrude

Yes, sir—But by whom?

The Magistrate (to the sheriff's officer) Write down that Madame de Grandchamp having herself unlocked for us the desk in her bedchamber and having herself given into our hands the parcel sealed by M. Baudrillon, this parcel which two days ago was intact is found unsealed and from it has been taken a dose, more than sufficient to produce death.

Gertrude

Death!—And I?

The Magistrate Madame, it was not without reason that I took from your desk this torn piece of paper. We have also picked up in *Mlle.* de Grandchamp's chamber a piece of paper, which exactly fits to it; and this proves that when you reached your desk, in that confusion which crime always brings upon criminals, you took up this paper to wrap up the dose, which you intended to mix with the infusion.

Gertrude

You said that you were my protector! And there, see now—

The Magistrate Give me your attention, madame. In face of such suspicions, I feel I shall have to change the writ of summons into a writ of bail or imprisonment. (He signs the document.) And now, madame, you must consider yourself under arrest.

Gertrude Of course, I will do all that you wish! But you told me that your mission was to search for the truth—Ah! Let us search for it here—Let us search for it here!



Page 47

The Magistrate
Certainly, madame.

Gertrude (to Ramel; she is weeping)
O M. Ramel!

Ramel
Have you anything to say in your defence which would lead us to cancel this terrible sentence?

Gertrude Gentlemen, I am innocent of the crime of poisoning, and yet all is against me! I implore you, give me your help instead of torturing me! And listen to me—Some one must have taken my key,—can you not understand? Some one must have come into my room—Ah! I see it all now— (To Ramel) Pauline loved as I loved; she has poisoned herself!

Ramel
For the sake of your honor, do not say that, without the most convincing proofs, otherwise—

The Magistrate
Madame, is it true that, yesterday, you, knowing Doctor Vernon was to dine with you, sent him—

Gertrude
Oh! you,—your questions are so many daggers at my heart! And yet you go on, you still go on.

The Magistrate
Did you send him away to attend a workman at Pre-l'Eveque?

Gertrude
I did, sir.

The Magistrate
This workman, madame, was found in a tavern, and in excellent help.

Gertrude
Champagne had told me that he was sick.

The Magistrate We have questioned Champagne, and he denies this, averring that he said nothing about sickness. The fact of it was, you wished to preclude the possibility of medical aid.



Gertrude (aside) It was Pauline! It was she who made me send away Vernon! O Pauline! You have dragged me down with yourself into the tomb, to which I sink bearing the name of criminal! No! No! No! (To Ramel) Sir, I have but one avenue of escape. (To Vernon) Is Pauline still alive?

Vernon (pointing to the General)
Here is my answer.

Scenetenth

The same persons and the General.

The General (to Vernon)
She is dying, my friend! If I lose her, I shall never survive it.

Vernon
My friend!

The General
It seems to me that there are a great many people here—What must be done? Oh, try to save her! I wonder where Gertrude is.

(They give the General a seat.)

Gertrude (sinking at the feet of the General) My friend! Poor father! I would this instant I might be killed without a trial. (She rises.) No, Pauline has wrapped me in her shroud, I feel her icy hands about my neck. And yet I was resigned. Yes, I would have buried with me the secret of this terrible drama, which every woman should understand! But I am weary of this struggle with a corpse that holds me tight, and communicates to me the coldness and the stiffness of death! I have made up my mind that my innocence of this crime shall come forth victorious at the expense of somebody's honor; for never, never could I become a vile and cowardly poisoner. Yes, I shall tell the whole, dark tale.

The General (rising from his seat and coming forward) Ah! so you are going to say in the face of justice all that for two days you have concealed by such obstinate silence—vile and ungrateful creature, fawning liar!—you have killed my daughter. Are you going to kill me also?



Page 48

Gertrude
Ought I to keep silence?—Ought I to speak?

Ramel
General, be kind enough to retire. The law commands.

The General
The law? You represent the justice of men, I represent the justice of God, and am higher than you all! I am at once accuser, tribunal, sentence and executioner—Come, madame, tell us what you have to say?

Gertrude (at the General's feet)
Forgive me, sir—Yes—I am—

Ramel
Oh, poor wretch!

Gertrude (aside) I cannot say it! Oh! for his honor's sake, may he never know the truth.
(Aloud) I am guilty before all the world, but to you I say, and will repeat it to my last breath, I am innocent! And some future day the truth shall speak from out two tombs, the cruel truth, which will show to you that you also are not free from reproach, but from the very blindness of your hate are culpable in all.

The General
I? I? Am I losing my senses? Do you dare to accuse me? (Perceiving Pauline.) Ah! Ah! My God!

Scene eleventh

The same persons, and Pauline (supported by Ferdinand).

Pauline They have told me all! This woman is innocent of the crime whereof she is accused. Religion has at last taught me that pardon cannot be obtained on high except by those who leave it behind them here below. I took from Madame the key of her desk, I myself sought the poison. I myself tore off the paper to wrap it up, for I wished to die.

Gertrude
O Pauline! Take my life, take all I love—Oh, doctor, save her!

The Magistrate
Is this the truth, mademoiselle?

Pauline
The truth, yes, for the dying alone speak it—



The Magistrate

We know then actually nothing about this business.

Pauline (to Gertrude) Do you know why I came to draw you from the abyss which had engulfed you? It is because Ferdinand spoke to me a word which brought me back from the tomb. He has so great a horror of being left with you in life that he follows me, and will follow me to the grave, where we shall rest together, wedded in death.

Gertrude

Ferdinand! Ah, my God! At what a price have I been saved!

The General

But unhappy child, wherefore must you die? Am I not, have I ceased for one moment to be a good father? And yet they say that I am culpable.

Ferdinand

Yes, General, I alone can give the answer to the riddle, and can explain to you your guilt.

The General

You, Ferdinand, you to whom I offered my daughter, you who loved her—

Ferdinand

My name is Ferdinand Comte de Marcandal, son of General Marcandal. Do you understand?

The General

Ah! son of a traitor! What could you bring to my home but death and treachery! Defend yourself!

Ferdinand

Would you fight, General, with the dead?

(Ferdinand falls.)

Gertrude (rushes to Ferdinand with a cry) Oh! (She recoils before the General, and approaches his daughter, then draws forth a phial, but immediately flings it away.) I will condemn myself to live for this old man! (The General kneels beside his dying daughter.) Doctor, what will become of him? Is he likely to lose his reason?

Page 49

The General (stammering like a man who has lost his speech)
I—I—I—

Vernon
General, what is it?

The General
I—I am trying—to pray—for my daughter!

Final curtain.