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CHAPTER I

MY FIRST SUPPER PARTY

The devil take me if I can remember her name, notwithstanding I dearly loved her, the charming girl!

It is strange how rich we find ourselves when we rummage in old drawers; how many forgotten sighs, how many pretty little trinkets, broken, old-fashioned, and dusty, we come across. But no matter. I was now eighteen, and, upon my honor, very unsuspecting. It was in the arms of that dear—I have her name at the tip of my tongue, it ended in “ine”—it was in her arms, the dear child, that I murmured my first words of love, while I was close to her rounded shoulder, which had a pretty little mole, where I imprinted my first kiss. I adored her, and she returned my affection.

Here my recollections cease. What then took place I do not know. All I remember is that some one took me home in a cab. I kept asking: "Where is she? Where? Oh, where?"

I was told that she had left two hours before. The next morning I experienced a keen sense of despair when the truffles of the examining magistrate came back to mind. For a moment I had a vague idea of entering upon holy orders, but time—you know what it is—calmed my troubled breast. But what the devil was her name? It ended in "ine." Indeed, no, I believe it ended in "a."

firmly established and so deeply rooted in my being, that I can look about me without danger. I do not fear for my own salvation, but I am shocked when I think of the future of our modern society, and I pray the Lord fervently, from a heart untainted by sin, not to turn away His countenance in wrath from

"I know," said my cousin, "that you swim well; the fame of your abilities has reached us here from your college. You are going to teach me to float, eh, Robert?"

“It is excessively hot, my dear cousin,” said she, fanning herself. “I tremble every moment in such weather lest Monsieur de Beurenard’s nose should explode or catch fire. Ha, ha, ha. Upon my word of honor I do.”

listened; not out of guilty curiosity, I can assure you, but out of a sincere wish to become better acquainted with that soul.

“No, no, Julie,” the marchioness was saying. “No, no; I won’t hear you say any more about that frightful waterproof cap. The water gets inside and does not come out. Twist up my hair in a net; nothing more is required.”

“Well, Robert, of what are you thinking? Give me your hand and help me to get into the water.”

She dipped the toes of her arched foot into the pellucid stream.

“This always gives one a little shock, but the water ought to be delightful to-day,” said she. “But what is the matter with you?—your hand shakes. You are a chilly mortal, cousin.”



Now that you know all the facts, my pious friend, bestow on me the favor of your counsel, and thank heaven that you live remote from scenes like these.

With heart and soul,
Your sincere friend,
Robert de K-----Dec-----.

CHAPTER III

“Her neck, her neck! but what of her hands, her arms and her shoulders! Did you see her at Leon’s ball a fortnight ago? A queen, my dear fellow, a Roman empress. Neck, shoulders, arms—”

“And all the rest,” hazards some one, looking down into his cup. All laugh heartily, and the good De K. comes in with a box of cigars which look exceptional.

“Here you are, my friends,” he says, coughing slightly, “but let me recommend you to smoke carefully.”

“My Fernand, go, seek glo-o-o-ry,” she was singing at the top of her voice. The singing appeared to me mediocre, but the songstress in her peignoir interested me much.

“Gentlemen,” said I, “it appears to me there is behind that frail tissue”—I alluded to the curtain—“a very handsome woman. Put out your cigars, if you please; their light might betray our presence and embarrass the fair singer.”

the moment she turned down the clothes, and prepared, to get into bed, the light went out.

But, for Heaven's sake, let me entreat you, do not noise abroad the affair!

CHAPTER IV

SOUVENIRS OF LENT

The faithful are flocking up the steps of the temple; spring toilettes already glitter in the sun; trains sweep the dust with their long flowing folds; feathers and ribbons flutter; the bell chimes solemnly, while carriages keep arriving at a trot, depositing upon the pavement all that is most pious and most noble in the Faubourg, then draw up in line at the farther end of the square.

“Quite, thanks. Do you see in front there, between the two tapers, Louise and Madame de C-----? Is it allowable in any one to come to church got up like that?”

“Oh! I have never believed much in the piety of Madame de C-----. You know her history—the story of the screen? I will tell it you later. Ah! there is the verger.”

The verger shows his bald head in the pulpit of truth. He arranges the seat, adjusts the kneeling-stool, then withdraws and allows the Abbe Gelon, who is somewhat pale from Lenten fasting, but striking, as he always is, in dignity, elegance, and unction. A momentary flutter passes through the congregation, then they settle down comfortably. The noise dies away, and all eyes are eagerly looking toward the face of the preacher. With his eyes turned to heaven, the latter stands upright and motionless; a light from above may be divined in his inspired look; his beautiful, white hands, encircled at the wrists by fine lace, are carelessly placed on the red velvet cushion of the pulpit. He waits a few moments, coughs twice, unfolds his handkerchief, deposits his square hat in a corner, and, bending forward, lets fall from his lips in those sweet slow, persuasive tones, by which he is known, the first words of his sermon, “Ladies!”

who do not comprehend the ineffable delight of being able to open at will the gates of Paradise to themselves, and to become, at odd moments, one with the angels! But what purpose does it serve to speak of the faithless and of their harmless, smiles? As the Abbe Gelon has in his inimitable manner observed, "The heart is a fortress, incessantly assailed by the spirit of darkness."

The good Abbe confesses all these ladies, and, with angelic devotion, remains shut up for hours in this dark, narrow, suffocating box, through the grating of which two penitents are continually whispering their sins.

The dear Abbe! the most likable thing about him is that he is not long over the business. He knows how to get rid of useless details; he perceives, with subtle instinct and a sureness of vision that spares you a thousand embarrassments, the condition of a soul, so that, besides being a man of intelligence and of the world, he renders the repetition of those little weaknesses, of which he has whispered the one half to you, almost agreeable.

Jane will go to heaven, since you yourself, dear Madame, are not so sure of entering there?

would pay that woman for her foot-warmer—I bow my head in the dust under the weight of repentance, and of.....”

“Ah! Madame de P. has finished; she is as red as the comb of a turkey-cock.”

Four ladies rush forward with pious ardor to take her place.

“Ah! Madame, do not push so, I beg of you.”

“But I was here before you, Madame.”

“I beg a thousand pardons, Madame.”

“You surely have a very strange idea of the respect which is due to this hallowed spot.”



Madame—My dear, I really don't know to what you refer. Please tell me all about it.

Hey Friend—Well, on entering the drawing-room, and perceiving the candelabra lit up, and the two Abbe's standing at that moment in the middle of the room, your husband appeared as if looking for something, and when Ernestine asked him what it was, he said aloud: "I am looking for the holy-water; please, dear neighbor, excuse me for coming in the middle of the service."

Madame—Is it possible? (Laughing.) The fact is, he can not get out of it; he has met the two Abbés, twice running, at Ernestine's. Her drawing-room is a perfect sacristy.

Hey Friend (dryly)—A sacristy! How regardless you are getting in your language since your marriage, dear.

Madame—Not more than before. I never cared to meet priests elsewhere than at church.

Her Friend—Come, you are frivolous, and if I did not know you better—but do you not like to meet the Abbe Gelon?

Madame—Ah! the Abbe Gelon, that is quite different. He is charming.

Her Friend—(briskly)—His manners are so distingue.

Madame Savain had laid on, at intervals, some ridiculous frippery. I wanted to try something else—my plan of crossbars, there and then—and I missed the dear Abbe Gelon's lecture. He was charming, it seems.

Her Friend—Oh! charming. He spoke against bad books; there was a large crowd. He demolished all the horrible opinions of Monsieur Renan. What a monster that man is!

Madame—You have read his book?

Her Friend—Heaven forbid! Don't you know it is impossible for one to find anything more—well, it must be very bad 'Messieurs de l'OEuvre' for the Abbe Gelon, in speaking to one of these friends of my husband, uttered the word——



Her Fiend—Ah! mon Dieu! they are all like that, these men; they are strong-minded, and when grace touches them, they look back on their past life with horror. When my husband speaks of his youth, the tears come into his eyes. I must tell you; that he has not always been as he is now; he was a gay boy in his youth, poor fellow. I do not detest a man because he knows life a little, do you? But I am gossiping and time passes; I have a call to make yet on Madame W. I do not know whether she has found her juvenile lead.

“Ha! ha! no, no, no! Besides, it wants five minutes to twelve and the clock is slow.”

We took a pinch together and walked off arm in arm by the little side door, for night sacraments, chatting in a friendly way.

Suddenly I found myself transported into my confessional. The chapel was full of ladies who all bowed at my approach. I entered my narrow box, the key of which I had. I arranged on the seat the air-cushion which is indispensable to me on the evenings preceding great church festivals, the sittings at that season being always prolonged. I slipped the white surplice which was hanging from a peg over my cassock, and, after meditating for a moment, opened the little shutter that puts me in communication with the penitents.

face escaped me; I could distinguish, almost in spite of myself, even a little quiver of her left eyebrow, tickled every now and again by a stray tress of her fair hair.

“Your situation,” I said, “is a delicate one; on one hand, your domestic happiness, and on the other your duty as a Christian.” She gave a sigh from her very heart. “Well, my dear child, my age warrants my speaking to you like that, does it not?”

“That is what I say to myself, father, but my husband unites with his kindness such a communicative gayety—he has such a graceful and natural way of excusing his impiety—that I laugh in spite of myself when I ought to weep. It seems to me that a cloud comes between myself and my duties, and my scruples evaporate beneath the charm of his presence and his wit. My husband has plenty of wit,” she added, with a faint smile, in which there was a tinge of pride.

“Hum! hum!” (the blackness of this man’s heart revolted me). “There is no seductive shape that the tempter does not assume, my child. Wit in itself is not to be condemned, although the Church shuns it as far as she is concerned, looking upon it as a worldly ornament; but it may become dangerous, it may be reckoned a veritable pest when it tends to weaken faith. Faith, which is to the soul, I hardly need tell you, what the bloom is to the peach, and—if I may so express myself, what the—dew is—to the flower—hum, hum! Go on, my child.”



My penitent's voice, which was very irritated, though restrained by respect for the locality, softened as if by magic at the creaking of my wicket. She knelt down, piously folded her two ungloved hands, plump, perfumed, rosy, laden with rings—but let that pass. I seemed to recognize the hands of the Countess de B., a chosen soul, whom I had the honor to visit frequently, especially on Saturday, when there is always a place laid for me at her table.

She raised her little lace veil and I saw that I was not mistaken. It was the Countess. She smiled at me as at a person with whom she was acquainted, but with perfect propriety; she seemed to be saying, "Good-day, my dear Abbe, I do not ask how your rheumatism is, because at this moment you are invested with a sacred character, but I am interested in it all the same."

I had a vague idea that I should not be contradicted.

“Yes, father,” she said, smoothing down her bonnet strings, “sometimes; but I have always made an effort to drive away such thoughts.”



CHAPTER VII

AN EMBASSY BALL

"Don't say that it is not pretty," added my aunt, brushing the firedog with the tip of her tiny boot. "It lends an especial charm to the look, I must acknowledge. A cloud of powder is most becoming, a touch of rouge has a charming effect, and even that blue shadow that they spread, I don't know how, under the eye. What coquettes some women are! Did you notice Anna's eyes at Madame de Sieurac's last Thursday? Is it allowable? Frankly, can you understand how any one can dare?"

"Well, aunt, I did not object to those eyes, and between ourselves they had a softness."



courtyard.” As she spoke she stretched out her foot, shod with a red-heeled slipper, glittering with gold embroidery. Her plump foot seemed to overflow the side of the shoe a trifle, and through the openwork of her bright silk stocking the rosy skin of her ankle showed at intervals.

“What do you think of me, Monsieur Artist?”

“But, Countess, my dear aunt, I mean, I—I am dazzled by this July sun, the brightest of all the year, you know. You are adorable, adorable—and your hair!”

“Is it not well arranged? Silvani did it; he has not his equal, that man. The diamonds in the hair go splendidly, and then this lofty style of head-dressing gives a majestic turn to the neck. I do not know whether you are aware that I have always been a coquette as regards my neck; it is my only bit of vanity. Have you brought your little color-pots?”

“Here it is.”

“Ah! in a bottle, it is liquid.”

“It is a kind of vinegar, as you see. Don’t move, aunt. Put out your lips as if you wished to kiss me. You don’t by chance want to?”

“Yes, and you deserve it. You will teach me your little accomplishments, will you not?”

“Willingly, aunt.”

“Your vinegar is miraculous! what brightness it gives to the lips, and how white one’s teeth look. It is true my teeth were always—”

that delightful little—I don't know what—which is so fashionable now, and which tempts one always to say too much.

When I say that I must have been possessed, it is because I think of the consequences to which that kiss might have led. Her husband, General de B., being my direct superior, it might have got me into a very awkward position; besides, there is the respect due to one's family. Oh, I have never failed in that.

But I do not know why I am recalling all these old recollections, which have nothing in common with what I am about to relate to you. My intention was simply to tell you that since my return from Mexico I go pretty frequently to Madame de B.'s, as perhaps you do also, for she keeps up a rather good establishment, receives every Monday evening, and there is usually a crowd of people at her house, for she is very entertaining. There is no form of amusement that she does not resort to in order to keep up her reputation as a woman of fashion. I must own, however, that I had never seen anything at her house to equal what I saw last Monday.

“Good evening, Captain,” called out a laughing voice from behind the screen on the right.

“We were expecting you,” came from behind the screen on the left.

“Good evening, ladies; what can I do for you?”

“Yes, aunt, I have some ideas; yes, I have some ideas about liquid white, and by summoning together all my recollections—”

“Is it true, Captain, that it causes rheumatism?”

“No, not at all; have a couple of logs put on the fire and give me the stuff.”

So saying, I turned up my sleeves and poured some of the “Milk of Beauty” into a little onyx bowl that was at hand, then I dipped a little sponge into it, and approached my Aunt Venus with a smile.

“Do not stir, aunt, I beg of you. Mesdemoiselles de N. appears too, then?”

“Yes, with their mamma; they represent ‘The Lights of Faith driving out Unbelief,’ thus they naturally require torches. You know, they are tin tubes with spirits of wine which blazes up. It will be, perhaps, the prettiest tableau of the evening. It is an indirect compliment we wish to pay to the Cardinal’s nephew; you know the dark young man with very curly hair and saintly eyes; you saw him last Monday. He is in high favor at court. The Comte de Geloni was kind enough to promise to come this evening, and then Monsieur de Saint P. had the idea of this tableau. His imagination is boundless, Monsieur de Saint P., not to mention his good taste, if he would not break his properties.”

“Is he not also a Chevalier of the Order of Saint Gregory?”

“Yes, and, between ourselves, I think that he would not be sorry to become an officer in it.”

“Ah! I understand, ‘The Lights of Faith driving out,’ *et cetera*. But tell me, aunt, am I not brushing you too hard? Lift up your arm a little, please. Tell me who has undertaken the part of Unbelief?”



very well, my sisters, to say, "But not at all—but how can it be, Father Z.?—you know nothing about it, reverend father."

I maintain that things are as I have stated, and that at heart you are absolutely of my opinion. Yes, your poor heart has suffered very often; there are nights during which you have wept, poor angel, vainly awaiting the dream of the evening before.

"Alas!" you say, "is it then all over? One summer's day, then thirty years of autumn, to me, who am so fond of sunshine." That is what you have thought.



And when the young man is seasoned for it, how happy she will be, poor little thing!—a ripe husband, ready to fall from the tree, fit to be put away in the apple-loft! What happiness! a good husband, who the day after his marriage will piously place his wife in a niche and light a taper in front of her; then take his hat and go off to spend elsewhere a scrap of youth left by chance at the bottom of his pocket.

surrounds him, from the lace on the curtains to the perfume that you use, a wish on your part to please him.

“Mademoiselle Berthe-----,” continued the magistrate, turning to me,
“do you swear to take for your husband-----”

I bowed, with a smile, and said to myself: “Certainly; that is plain enough; I came here for that express purpose.”

kneeling about me were settling the skirt, and the hairdresser was clipping the tulle of the veil, he said in a husky voice, "You look charming, dear."



that they did not think that I looked ugly. On reaching the gilt chair, I bent forward with restrained eagerness—my chignon was high, revealing my neck, which is passable—and thanked the Lord. The organ ceased its triumphal song and I could hear my poor mother bursting into tears beside me. Oh! I understand what a mother's heart must feel during such a ceremony. While watching with satisfaction the clergy who were solemnly advancing, I noticed Georges; he seemed irritated; he was stiff, upright, his nostrils dilated, and his lips set. I have always been rather vexed at him for not having been a little more sensible to what I was experiencing that day, but men do not understand this kind of poetry.

solemn had just taken place before God and man; I felt conscious of being linked in eternal bonds. I was married!



and half sour, from my mother-in-law, which had recalled me to a true sense of the situation. If, Monsieur, you happen to have gone through a similar day of violent effusion and general expansion, you will agree with me that during no other moment of your life were you more inclined to irritability.

of the assault on the Malakoff. Suddenly the General, who was still going on with his eternal game at ecarte with the prefect, turned round.



“Oh, I do not doubt your affection; go, my dear boy, go and make her happy; yes, oh, yes! Fear nothing on my account; I am strong.”

Nothing is more unbearable than emotion when one does not share it. I murmured “Mother!” feeling that after all she must appreciate such an outburst; then approaching, I kissed her, and made a face in spite of myself—such a salt and disagreeable flavor had been imparted to my mother-in-law’s countenance by the tears she had shed.

She could not help smiling, and I saw that she was blushing.

“Oh! do not be afraid, dear; I will only kiss the tips of your fingers gently, like that,” and seeing that she let me do so, I sat down on the bed.

She gave a little cry. I had sat down on her foot, which was straying beneath the bedclothes.

She did not answer, but her eyes met mine and I saw in them a smile which seemed to thank me, but a smile so subtle that in any other circumstances I should have seen a shadow of raillery in it.

“You will be my little wife, then, Louise; you will let me teach you to love me as I love you?”

“I do love you,” said she, but so softly and so gently that she seemed to be dreaming.

How many times have we not laughed over these recollections, already so remote.

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

A ripe husband, ready to fall from the tree
Answer “No,” but with a little kiss which means “Yes”
As regards love, intention and deed are the same
Clumsily, blew his nose, to the great relief of his two arms
Emotion when one does not share it
Hearty laughter which men affect to assist digestion
How rich we find ourselves when we rummage in old drawers
Husband who loves you and eats off the same plate is better
I came here for that express purpose
Ignorant of everything, undesirous of learning anything
It is silly to blush

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under certain circumstances

Love in marriage is, as a rule, too much at his ease
Rather do not give—make yourself sought after
Reckon yourself happy if in your husband you find a lover
There are pious falsehoods which the Church excuses
To be able to smoke a cigar without being sick
Why mankind has chosen to call marriage a man-trap

MONSIEUR, MADAME AND BEBE

By Gustave Droz

BOOK 2.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BLUE NOTE-BOOK

Toward midnight mamma made a sign to me with her eyes, and under cover of a lively waltz we slipped out of the drawing-room. In the hall the servants, who were passing to and fro, drew aside to let us go by them, but I felt that their eyes were fixed upon me with the curiosity which had pursued me since the morning. The large door giving on to the park was open, although the night was cool, and in the shadow I could make out groups of country folk gathered there to catch a glimpse of the festivities through the windows. These good people were laughing and whispering; they were silent for a moment as we advanced to ascend the staircase, but I once more felt that I was the mark of these inquisitive looks and the object of all these smiles. The face of mamma, who accompanied me, was much flushed, and large tears were flowing from her eyes.

How was it that an event so gay for some was so sad for others?

When I think over it now I can hardly keep my countenance. What silly terrors at that frightful yet charming moment! Yet, after all, one exaggerates things a great deal.

On reaching the first floor mamma stopped, choking, took my head in her hands, and kissed me on the forehead, and exclaimed, "Valentine!" I was not greatly moved by this outburst, knowing that mamma, since she has grown a little too stout, has some difficulty in getting upstairs. I judged, therefore, that the wish to take breath for a moment without appearing to do so had something to do with this sudden halt.

We entered the nuptial chamber; it was as coquettish as possible, refreshing to the eye, snug, elegant, and adorned with fine Louis XVI furniture, upholstered in Beauvais tapestry. The bed, above all, was a marvel of elegance, but to tell the truth I had no idea of it till a week later. At the outside it seemed to me that I was entering an austere-looking locality; the very air we breathed appeared to me to have something solemn and awe-striking about it.

“Here is your room, child,” said mamma; “but first of all come and sit here beside me, my dear girl.”

At these words we both burst into tears, and mamma then expressed herself as follows:

“The kiss you are giving me, Valentine, is the last kiss that I shall have from you as a girl. Your husband—for Georges is that now—”

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At these words I shuddered slightly, and by a singular freak of my brain pictured to myself Monsieur Georges—Georges—my husband—in a cotton night cap and a dressing-gown. The vision flashed across my mind in the midst of the storm. I saw him just as plainly as if he had been there. It was dreadful. The nightcap came over his forehead, down to his eyebrows, and he said to me, pressing my hand; “At last, Valentine; you are mine; do you love me? oh! tell me, do you love me?” And as his head moved as he uttered these words, the horrible tuft at the end of his nightcap waggled as an accompaniment.

“No,” I said to myself, “it is impossible for my husband to appear in such a fashion; let me banish this image—and yet my father wears the hideous things, and my brother, who is quite young, has them already. Men wear them at all ages, unless though—” It is frightful to relate, but Georges now appeared to me with a red-and-green bandanna handkerchief tied round his head. I would have given ten years of my life to be two hours older, and hurriedly passed my hand across my eyes to drive away these diabolical visions.

However, mamma, who had been still speaking all the time, attributing this movement to the emotion caused by her words, said, with great sweetness:

“Do not be alarmed, my dear Valentine; perhaps I am painting the picture in too gloomy colors; but my experience and my love render this duty incumbent upon me.”

I have never heard mamma express herself so fluently. I was all the more surprised as, not having heard a word of what she had already said, this sentence seemed suddenly sprung upon me. Not knowing what to answer, I threw myself into the arms of mamma, who, after a minute or so, put me away gently, saying, “You are suffocating me, dear.”

She wiped her eyes with her little cambric handkerchief, which was damp, and said, smilingly:

“Now that I have told you what my conscience imposed on me, I am strong. See, dear, I think that I can smile. Your husband, my dear child, is a man full of delicacy. Have confidence; accept all without misgiving.”

Mamma kissed me on the forehead, which finished off her sentence, and added:

“Now, dear one, I have fulfilled a duty I regarded as sacred. Come here and let me take your wreath off.”

“By this time,” I thought, “they have noticed that I have left the drawing-room. They are saying, ‘Where is the bride?’ and smiling, ‘Monsieur Georges is getting uneasy. What is he doing? what is he thinking? where is he?’”



“Have you tried on your nightcap, dear?” said mamma, who had recovered herself; “it looks rather small to me, but is nicely embroidered. Oh, it is lovely!”

And she examined it from every point of view.

At that moment there was a knock at the door. “It is I,” said several voices, among which I distinguished the flute-like tones of my aunt Laura, and those of my godmother. Madame de P., who never misses a chance of pressing her two thick lips to some one’s cheeks, accompanied them. Their eyes glittered, and all three had a sly and triumphant look, ferreting and inquisitive, which greatly intimidated me. Would they also set about fulfilling a sacred duty?

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“Oh, you are really too pretty, my angel!” said Madame de P., kissing me on the forehead, after the moist fashion peculiar to her, and then sitting down in the large Louis XVI armchair.

My maid had not been allowed to undress me, so that all of them, taking off their gloves, set to work to render me this service. They tangled the laces, caught their own lace in the hooks, and laughed heartily all the while.

“It is the least that the oldest friend of the family,”—she loved to speak of herself as such—“should make herself useful at such a moment,” muttered Madame de P., holding her eyeglass in one hand and working with the other.

I passed into a little boudoir to complete my toilette for the night, and found on the marble of the dressing-table five or six bottles of scent, tied up with red, white, and blue ribbons—an act of attention on the part of my Aunt Laura. I felt the blood flying to my head; there was an unbearable singing in my ears. Now that I can coolly weigh the impressions I underwent, I can tell that what I felt above all was anger. I would have liked to be in the farthest depths of the wildest forest in America, so unseemly did I find this curious kindness which haunted me with its attentions. I should have liked to converse a little with myself, to fathom my own emotion somewhat, and, in short, to utter a brief prayer before throwing myself into the torrent.

However, through the open door, I could hear the four ladies whispering together and stifling their outbursts of laughter; I had never seen them so gay. I made up my mind. I crossed the room, and, shaking off the pretty little white slippers which my mother had embroidered for me, jumped into bed. I was not long in finding out that it was no longer my own narrow little bed. It was immense, and I hesitated a moment, not knowing which way to turn. I felt nevertheless a feeling of physical comfort. The bed was warm, and I do not know what scent rose from its silken coverlet. I felt myself sink into the mass of feathers, the pillows, twice over too large and trimmed with embroidery, gave way as it were beneath me, burying me in a soft and perfumed abyss.

At length the ladies rose, and after giving a glance round the room, doubtless to make sure that nothing was lacking, approached the bed.

“Good-night, my dear girl,” said my mother, bending over me.

She kissed me, carried her handkerchief, now reduced to a wet dab, to her eyes, and went out with a certain precipitation.

“Remember that the old friend of the family kissed you on this night, my love,” said Madame de P., as she moistened my forehead.

“Come, my little lamb, good-night and sleep well,” said my aunt, with her smile that seemed to issue from her nose. She added in a whisper: “You love him, don’t you? The slyboots! she won’t answer! Well, since you love him so much, don’t tell him so, my dear. But I must leave you; you are sleepy. Goodnight.”

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And she went away, smiling.

At length I was alone. I listened; the doors were being closed, I heard a carriage roll along the road; the flame of the two candles placed upon the mantelshelf quivered silently and were reflected in the looking-glass.

I thought about the ceremony of that morning, the dinner, the ball. I said to myself, clenching my fists to concentrate my thoughts: "How was Marie dressed? She was dressed in—dressed in—dressed in—" I repeated the words aloud to impart more authority to them and oblige my mind to reply; but do what I would, it was impossible for me to drive away the thought that invaded my whole being.

"He is coming. What is he doing? Where is he? Perhaps he is on the stairs now. How shall I receive him when he comes?"

I loved him; oh! with my whole soul, I can acknowledge it now; but I loved him quite at the bottom of my heart. In order to think of him I went down into the very lowest chamber of my heart, bolted the door, and crouched down in the darkest corner.

At last, at a certain moment, the floor creaked, a door was opened in the passage with a thousand precautions, and I heard the tread of a boot—a boot!

The boot ceased to creak, and I heard quite close to me, on the other side of the wall, which was nothing but a thin partition, an armchair being rolled across the carpet, and then a little cough, which seemed to me to vibrate with emotion. It was he! But for the partition I could have touched him with my finger. A few moments later I could distinguish the almost imperceptible sound of footsteps on the carpet; this faint sound rang violently in my head. All at once my breathing and my heart both stopped together; there was a tap at the door. The tapping was discreet, full of entreaty and delicacy. I wanted to reply, "Come in," but I had no longer any voice; and, besides, was it becoming to answer like that, so curtly and plainly? I thought "Come in" would sound horribly unseemly, and I said nothing. There was another tap. I should really have preferred the door to have been broken open with a hatchet or for him to have come down the chimney. In my agony I coughed faintly among my sheets. That was enough; the door opened, and I divined from the alteration in the light shed by the candles that some one at whom I did not dare look was interposing between them and myself.

This some one, who seemed to glide across the carpet, drew near the bed, and I could distinguish out of the corner of my eye his shadow on the wall. I could scarcely restrain my joy; my Captain wore neither cotton nightcap nor bandanna handkerchief. That was indeed something. However, in this shadow which represented him in profile, his nose had so much importance that amid all my uneasiness a smile flitted across my lips. Is it not strange how all these little details recur to your mind? I did not dare turn round, but I devoured with my eyes this shadow representing my husband; I tried to trace in it the

slightest of his gestures; I even sought the varying expressions of his physiognomy, but, alas! in vain.

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I do not know how to express in words all that I felt at that moment; my pen seems too clumsy to write my sensations, and, besides, did I really see deep into my heart?

Do men comprehend all this? Do they understand that the heart requires gradual changes, and that if a half-light awakens, a noon-day blaze dazzles and burns? It is not that the poor child, who is trembling in a corner, refuses to learn; far from that, she has aptitude, good-will, and a quick and ready intelligence; she knows she has reached the age at which it is necessary to know how to read; she rejects neither the science nor even the teacher. It is the method of instruction that makes her uneasy. She is afraid lest this young professor, whose knowledge is so extensive, should turn over the pages of the book too quickly and neglect the A B C.

A few hours back he was the submissive, humble lover, ready to kneel down before her, hiding his knowledge as one hides a sin, speaking his own language with a thousand circumspections. At any moment it might have been thought that he was going to blush. She was a queen, he a child; and now all at once the roles are changed; it is the submissive subject who arrives in the college cap of a professor, hiding under his arm an unknown and mysterious book. Is the man in the college cap about to command, to smile, to obtrude himself and his books, to speak Latin, to deliver a lecture?

She does not know that this learned individual is trembling, too; that he is greatly embarrassed over his opening lesson, that emotion has caused him to forget his Latin, that his throat is parched and his legs are trembling beneath him. She does not know this, and I tell you between ourselves, it is not her self-esteem that suffers least at this conjecture. She suffers at finding herself, after so many signatures, contracts, and ceremonies—still a charming child, and nothing more.

I believe that the first step in conjugal life will, according to the circumstances accompanying it, give birth to captivating sympathies or invincible repulsion. But to give birth to these sympathies, to strike the spark that is to set light to this explosion of infinite gratitude and joyful love—what art, what tact, what delicacy, and at the same time what presence of mind are needed.

How was it that at the first word Georges uttered my terrors vanished? His voice was so firm and so sweet, he asked me so gayly for leave to draw near the fire and warm his feet, and spoke to me with such ease and animation of the incidents of the day. I said to myself, "It is impossible for the least baseness to be hidden under all this." In presence of so much good-humor and affability my scaffolding fell to pieces. I ventured a look from beneath the sheets: I saw him comfortably installed in the big armchair, and I bit my lips. I am still at a loss to understand this little fit of ill-temper. When one is reckoning on a fright, one is really disappointed at its delaying itself. Never had Georges been more witty, more affectionate, more well-bred; he was still the man of the day before. He must really have been very excited.

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"You are tired out, I am certain, darling," he said.

The word "darling" made me start, but did not frighten me; it was the first time he had called me so, but I really could not refuse him the privilege of speaking thus. However it may be, I maintained my reserve, and in the same tone as one replies, "No thanks, I don't take tea," I answered:

"Oh, yes! I am worn out."

"I thought so," he added, approaching the bed; "you can not keep your eyes open; you can not even look at me, my dear little wife."

"I will leave you," continued he. "I will leave you; you need repose." And he drew still more closely to me, which was not natural. Then, stretching out his hand, which I knew was white and well cared for: "Won't you give me a little shake of the hand, dear? I am half asleep, too, my pretty little wife." His face wore an expression which was alarming, though not without its charm; as he said this, I saw clearly that he had lied to me like a demon, and that he was no more sleepy than I was.

However that may be, I was guilty of the fault, the carelessness that causes disaster, of letting him take my hand, which was straying by chance under the lace of the pillows.

I was that evening in a special condition of nervous sensibility, for at this contact a strange sensation ran through me from head to foot. It was not that the Captain's hand had the softness of satin—I believe that physical sensations, in us women, have causes directly contrary to those which move men; for that which caused me such lively emotion was precisely its firmness. There was something strong, manly, and powerful about it. He squeezed my hand rather strongly.

My rings, which I have a fancy for wearing all at once, hurt me, and—I really should not have believed it—I liked it very much, perhaps too much. For the first time I found an inexplicable, an almost intoxicating, charm in this intimate contact with a being who could have crushed me between his fingers, and that in the middle of the night too, in silence, without any possibility of help. It was horribly delicious.

I did not withdraw my hand, which he kissed, but lingeringly. The clock struck two, and the last sound had long since died away when his lips were still there, quivering with rapid little movements, which were so many imperceptible kisses, moist, warm, burning. I felt gleams of fire flashing around me. I wished to draw away my hand, but could not; I remember perfectly well that I could not. His moustache pricked me, and whiffs of the scent with which he perfumed it reached me and completed my trouble. I felt my nostrils dilating despite myself, and, striving but in vain to take refuge in my inmost being, I exclaimed inwardly: "Protect me, Lord, but this time with all your might.

A drop of water, Lord; a drop of water!" I waited—no appreciable succor reached from above. It was not till a week afterward that I understood the intentions of Providence.

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"You told me you were sleepy," I murmured, in a trembling voice. I was like a shipwrecked person clutching at a floating match-box; I knew quite well that the Captain would not go away.

"Yes, I was sleepy, pet," said Georges, approaching his face to mine; "but now I am athirst." He put his lips to my ear and whispered softly, "Athirst for a kiss from you, love."

This "love" was the beginning of another life. The spouse now appeared, the past was fleeing away, I was entering on the future. At length I had crossed the frontier; I was in a foreign land. Oh! I acknowledge—for what is the use of feigning?—that I craved for this love, and I felt that it engrossed me and spread itself through me. I felt that I was getting out of my depth, I let go the last branch that held me to the shore, and to myself I repeated: "Yes, I love you; yes, I am willing to follow you; yes, I am yours, love, love, love!"

"Won't you kiss your husband; come, won't you?"

And his mouth was so near my own that it seemed to meet my lips.

"Yes," said I.

.....

August 7th, 185-How many times have I not read through you during the last two years, my little blue note-book! How many things I might add as marginal notes if you were not doomed to the flames, to light my first fire this autumn! How could I have written all this, and how is it that having done so I have not dared to complete my confidences! No one has seen you, at any rate; no one has turned your pages. Go back into your drawer, dear, with, pending the first autumn fire, a kiss from your Valentine.

Note.—Owing to what circumstances this blue note-book, doomed to the flames, was discovered by me in an old Louis XVI chiffonnier I had just bought does not greatly matter to you, dear reader, and would be out of my power to explain even if it did.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BLUE NOTE-BOOK AGAIN

Only to think that I was going to throw you into the fire, poor dear! Was I not foolish? In whom else could I confide? If I had not you, to whom could I tell all those little things at which every one laughs, but which make you cry!

This evening, for instance, I dined alone, for Georges was invited out; well, to whom else can I acknowledge that when I found myself alone, face to face with a leg of mutton, cooked to his liking, and with the large carving-knife which is usually beside his plate, before me, I began to cry like a child? To whom else can I admit that I drank out of the Bohemian wine-glass he prefers, to console me a little?

But if I were to mention this they would laugh in my face. Father Cyprien himself, who nevertheless has a heart running over with kindness, would say to me:

“Let us pass that by, my dear child; let us pass that by.”

I know him so well, Father Cyprien; while you, you always listen to me, my poor little note-book; if a tear escapes me, you kindly absorb it and retain its trace like a good-hearted friend. Hence I love you.

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And, since we are *tete-a-tete*, let us have a chat. You won't be angry with me for writing with a pencil, dear. You see I am very comfortably settled in my big *by-by* and I do not want to have any ink-stains. The fire sparkles on the hearth, the street is silent; let us forget that George will not return till midnight, and turn back to the past.

I can not recall the first month of that dear past without laughing and weeping at one and the same time.

How foolish we were! How sweet it was! There is a method of teaching swimming which is not the least successful, I am told. It consists in throwing the future swimmer into the water and praying God to help him. I am assured that after the first lesson he keeps himself afloat.

Well, I think that we women are taught to be wives in very much the same fashion.

Happy or otherwise—the point is open to discussion marriage is a hurricane—something unheard-of and alarming.

In a single night, and without any transition, everything is transformed and changes color; the erst while-cravatted, freshly curled, carefully dressed gentleman makes his appearance in a dressing-gown. That which was prohibited becomes permissible, the code is altered, and words acquire a meaning they never had before, *et cetera*, *et cetera*.

It is not that all this is so alarming, if taken the right way—a woman with some courage in her heart and some flexibility in her mind supports the shock and does not die under it; but the firmest of us are amazed at it, and stand open-mouthed amid all these strange novelties, like a penniless gourmand in the shop of Potel and Chabot.

They dare not touch these delicacies surrounding them, though invited to taste. It is not that the wish or the appetite is lacking to them, but all these fine fruits have been offered them so lately that they have still the somewhat acid charm of green apples or forbidden fruit. They approach, but they hesitate to bite.

After all, why complain? What would one have to remember if one had entered married life like an inn, if one had not trembled a little when knocking at the door? And it is so pleasant to recall things, that one would sometimes like to deck the future in the garments of the past.

It was, I recollect, two days after the all-important one. I had gone into his room, I no longer remember why—for the pleasure of going in, I suppose, and thereby acting as a wife. A strong desire is that which springs up in your brain after leaving church to look like an old married woman. You put on caps with ribbons, you never lay aside your cashmere shawl, you talk of “my home”—two sweet words—and then you bite your lips

to keep from breaking out into a laugh; and “my husband,” and “my maid,” and the first dinner you order, when you forget the soup. All this is charming, and, however ill at ease you may feel at first in all these new clothes, you are quite eager to put them on.



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So I had gone into the dressing-room of my husband, who, standing before the glass, very lightly clad, was prosaically shaving.

"Excuse me, dear," said he, laughing, and he held up his shaving-brush, covered with white lather. "You will pardon my going on with this. Do you want anything?"

"I came, on the contrary," I answered, "to see whether you had need of anything;" and, greatly embarrassed myself, for I was afraid of being indiscreet, and I was not sure whether one ought to go into one's husband's room like this, I added, innocently, "Your shirts have buttons, have they not?"

"Oh, what a good little housewife I have married! Do not bother yourself about such trifles, my pet. I will ask your maid to look after my buttons," said he.

I felt confused; I was afraid of appealing too much of a schoolgirl in his eyes. He went on working his soap into a lather with his shaving-brush. I wanted to go away, but I was interested in such a novel fashion by the sight of my husband, that I had not courage to do so. His neck was bare—a thick, strong neck, but very white and changing its shape at every movement—the muscles, you know. It would have been horrible in a woman, that neck, and yet it did not seem ugly to me. Nor was it admiration that thus inspired me; it was rather like gluttony. I wanted to touch it. His hair, cut very short—according to regulation—grew very low, and between its beginning and the ear there was quite a smooth white place. The idea at once occurred to me that if ever I became brave enough, it was there that I should kiss him oftenest; it was strange, that presentiment, for it is in fact on that little spot that I—

He stopped short. I fancied I understood that he was afraid of appearing comical in my eyes, with his face smothered in lather; but he was wrong. I felt myself all in a quiver at being beside a man—the word man is rather distasteful to me, but I can not find another, for husband would not express my thoughts—at being beside a man in the making of his toilette. I should have liked him to go on without troubling himself; I should have liked to see how he managed to shave himself without encroaching on his moustache, how he made his parting and brushed his hair with the two round brushes I saw on the table, what use he made of all the little instruments set out in order on the marble—tweezers, scissors, tiny combs, little pots and bottles with silver tops, and a whole arsenal of bright things, that aroused quite a desire to beautify one's self.

I should have liked him while talking to attend to the nails of his hands, which I was already very fond of; or, better still, to have handed them over to me. How I should have rummaged in the little corners, cut, filed, arranged all that.

"Well, dear, what are you looking at me like that for?" said he, smiling.

I lowered my eyes at once, and felt that I was blushing. I was uneasy, although charmed, amid these new surroundings. I did not know what to answer, and mechanically I dipped the tip of my finger into the little china pot in which the soap was being lathered.

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“What is the matter, darling?” said he, approaching his face to mine; “have I offended you?”

I don’t know what strange idea darted through my mind, but I suddenly took my hand from the pot and stuck the big ball of lather at the end of my finger on the tip of his nose. He broke out into a hearty laugh, and so did I; though I trembled for a moment, lest he should be angry.

“So that’s the way in which you behave to a captain in the lancers? You shall pay for this, you wicked little darling;” and, taking the shaving brush in his hand, he chased me round the room. I dodged round the table, I took refuge behind the armchair, upsetting his boots with my skirt, getting the tongs at the same time entangled in it. Passing the sofa, I noticed his uniform laid out—he had to wait on the General that morning—and, seizing his schapska, I made use of it as a buckler. But laughter paralyzed me, and besides, what could a poor little woman do against a soldier, even with a buckler?

He ended by catching me—the struggle was a lovely one. It was all very well for me to scream, as I threw my head backward over the arm by which he clasped me; I none the less saw the frightful brush, like a big snowball, at the end of a little stick, come nearer and yet nearer.

But he was merciful; he was satisfied with daubing a little white spot on my chin and exclaiming, “The cavalry have avenged themselves.”

Seizing the brush in turn, I said to him roguishly, “Captain, let me lather your face,” for I did so want to do that.

In answer, he held his face toward me, and, observing that I was obliged to stand on the tips of my toes and to support myself a little on his shoulder, he knelt down before me and yielded his head to me.

With the tip of my finger I made him bend his face to the right and the left, backward and forward, and I lathered and lathered, giggling like a schoolgirl. It amused me so to see my Captain obey me like a child; I would have given I don’t know what if he had only had his sword and spurs on at that moment. Unfortunately, he was in his slippers. I spread the lather over his nose and forehead; he closed his eyes and put his two arms round me, saying:

“Go on, my dear, go on; but see that you don’t put any into my mouth.”

At that moment I experienced a very strange feeling. My laughter died away all at once; I felt ashamed at seeing my husband at my feet and at thus amusing myself with him as if he were a doll.



I dropped the shaving-brush; I felt my eyes grow moist; and, suddenly, becoming more tender, I bent toward him and kissed him on the neck, which was the only spot left clear.

Yet his ear was so near that, in passing it, my lips moved almost in spite of myself, and I whispered:

“Don’t be angry, dear,” then, overcome by emotion and repentance, I added: “I love you, I do love you.”

“My own pet!” he said, rising suddenly. His voice shook.

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What delightful moments these were! Unfortunately, oh! yes, indeed, unfortunately, he could not press his lathered face to mine!

“Wait a little,” he exclaimed, darting toward the washbasin, full of water, “wait an instant!”

But it seemed as if it took him a week to wash it off.

CHAPTER XV

MY WIFE GOES TO A DANCE

Madame—Ah! it is so nice of you to come home early! (Looking at the clock.) A quarter to six. But how cold you are! your hands are frozen; come and sit by the fire. (She puts a log on the fire.) I have been thinking of you all day. It is cruel to have to go out in such weather. Have you finished your doubts? are you satisfied?

Monsieur—Quite well satisfied, dear. (Aside.) But I have never known my wife to be so amiable. (Aloud, taking up the bellows.) Quite well satisfied, and I am very hungry. Has my darling been good?

Madame—You are hungry. Good! (Calling out.) Marie, call into the kitchen that your master wants to dine early. Let them look after everything—and send up a lemon.

Monsieur—A mystery?

Madame—Yes, Monsieur, I have a little surprise for you, and I fancy that it will delight you.

Monsieur—Well, what is the surprise?

Madame—Oh! it is a real surprise. How curious you look! your eyes are glittering already. Suppose I were not to tell you anything?

Monsieur—Then you would vex me very much.

Madame—There, I don’t want to vex you. You are going to have some little green oysters and a partridge. Am I good?

Monsieur—Oysters and a partridge! You are an angel. (He kisses her.) An angel. (Aside.) What on earth is the matter with her? (Aloud.) Have you had visitors to-day?

Madame—I saw Ernestine this morning, but she only stayed a moment. She has just discharged her maid. Would you believe it, that girl was seen the night before last dressed up as a man, and in her master's clothes, too! That was going too far.

Monsieur—That comes of having confidential servants. And you just got a sight of Ernestine?

Madame—And that was quite enough, too. (With an exclamation.) How stupid I am! I forgot. I had a visit from Madame de Lyr as well.

Monsieur—God bless her! But does she still laugh on one side of her mouth to hide her black tooth?

Madame—How cruel you are! Yet, she likes you very well. Poor woman! I was really touched by her visit. She came to remind me that we—now you will be angry. (She kisses him and sits down beside him.)

Monsieur—Be angry! be angry! I'm not a Turk. Come, what is it?

Madame—Come, we shall go to dinner. You know that there are oysters and a partridge. I won't tell you—you are already in a bad temper. Besides, I all but told her that we are not going.

Monsieur—(raising his hands aloft)—I thought so. She and her evening may go to the dogs. What have I done to this woman that she should so pester me?

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Madame—But she thinks she is affording you pleasure. She is a charming friend. As for me, I like her because she always speaks well of you. If you had been hidden in that cabinet during her visit, you could not have helped blushing. (He shrugs his shoulders.) “Your husband is so amiable,” she said to me, “so cheery, so witty. Try to bring him; it is an honor to have him.” I said, “Certainly,” but without meaning it, you know. But I don’t care about it at all. It is not so very amusing at Madame de Lyr’s. She always invites such a number of serious people. No doubt they are influential people, and may prove useful, but what does that matter to me? Come to dinner. You know that there is a bottle left of that famous Pomard; I have kept it for your partridge. You can not imagine what pleasure I feel in seeing you eat a partridge. You eat it with such a gusto. You are a glutton, my dear. (She takes his arm.) Come, I can hear your rascal of a son getting impatient in the dining-room.

Monsieur—(with a preoccupied air)—Hum! and when is it?

Madame—When is what?

Monsieur—The party, of course.

Madame—Ah! you mean the ball—I was not thinking of it. Madame de Lyr’s ball. Why do you ask me that, since we are not going? Let us make haste, dinner is getting cold This evening.

Monsieur—(stopping short)—What! this party is a ball, and this ball is for this evening. But, hang it! people don’t invite you to a ball like that. They always give notice some time beforehand.

Madame—But she sent us an invitation a week ago, though I don’t know what became of the card. I forgot to show it to you.

Monsieur—You forgot! you forgot!

Madame—Well, it is all for the best; I know you would have been sulky all the week after. Come to dinner.

They sat down to table. The cloth was white, the cutlery bright, the oysters fresh; the partridge, cooked to perfection, exhaled a delightful odor. Madame was charming, and laughed at everything. Monsieur unbent his brows and stretched himself on the chair.

Monsieur—This Pomard is very good. Won’t you have some, little dear?

Madame—Yes, your little dear will. (She pushes forward her glass with a coquettish movement.)

Monsieur—Ah! you have put on your Louis Seize ring. It is a very pretty ring.



Madame—(putting her hand under her husband's nose)—Yes; but look—see, there is a little bit coming off.

Monsieur—(kissing his wife's hand)—Where is the little bit?

Madame—(smiling)—You jest at everything. I am speaking seriously. There—look—it is plain enough! (They draw near once another and bend their heads together to see it.) Don't you see it? (She points out a spot on the ring with a rosy and slender finger.) There! do you see now—there?

Monsieur—That little pearl which—What on earth have you been putting on your hair, my dear? It smells very nice—You must send it to the jeweller. The scent is exquisite. Curls don't become you badly.

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Madame—Do you think so? (She adjusts her coiffure with her white hand.) I thought you would like that scent; now, if I were in your place I should—

Monsieur—What would you do in my place, dear?

Madame—I should—kiss my wife.

Monsieur—(kissing her)—Well, I must say you have very bright ideas sometimes. Give me a little bit more partridge, please. (With his mouth full.) How pretty these poor little creatures look when running among the corn. You know the cry they give when the sun sets?—A little gravy.—There are moments when the poetic side of country life appeals to one. And to think that there are barbarians who eat them with cabbage. But (filling his glass) have you a gown ready?

Madame—(with innocent astonishment.)—What for, dear?

Monsieur—Why, for Madame de Lyr's—

Madame—For the ball?—What a memory you have—There you are still thinking of it—No, I have not—ah! yes, I have my tarletan, you know; but then a woman needs so little to make up a ball-room toilette.

Monsieur—And the hairdresser, has he been sent for?

Madame—No, he has not been sent for; but I am not anxious to go to this ball. We will settle down by the fireside, read a little, and go to bed early. You remind me, however, that, on leaving, Madame de Lyr did say, "Your hairdresser is the same as mine, I will send him word." How stupid I am; I remember now that I did not answer her. But it is not far, I can send Marie to tell him not to come.

Monsieur—Since this blessed hairdresser has been told, let him come and we will go and—amuse ourselves a little at Madame de Lyr's. But on one condition only; that I find all my dress things laid out in readiness on my bed with my gloves, you know, and that you tie my necktie.

Madame—A bargain. (She kisses him.) You are a jewel of a husband. I am delighted, my poor dear, because I see you are imposing a sacrifice upon yourself in order to please me; since, as to the ball itself, I am quite indifferent about it. I did not care to go; really now I don't care to go.

Monsieur—Hum. Well, I will go and smoke a cigar so as not to be in your way, and at ten o'clock I will be back here. Your preparations will be over and in five minutes I shall be dressed. Adieu.

Madame—Au revoir.



Monsieur, after reaching the street, lit his cigar and buttoned up his great-coat. Two hours to kill. It seems a trifle when one is busy, but when one has nothing to do it is quite another thing. The pavement is slippery, rain is beginning to fall—fortunately the Palais Royal is not far off. At the end of his fourteenth tour round the arcades, Monsieur looks at his watch. Five minutes to ten, he will be late. He rushes home.

In the courtyard the carriage is standing waiting.

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In the bedroom two unshaded lamps shed floods of light. Mountains of muslin and ribbons are piled on the bed and the furniture. Dresses, skirts, petticoats, and underpetticoats, lace, scarfs, flowers, jewels, are mingled in a charming chaos. On the table there are pots of pomade, sticks of cosmetic, hairpins, combs and brushes, all carefully set out. Two artificial plaits stretch themselves languishingly upon a dark mass not unlike a large handful of horsehair. A golden hair net, combs of pale tortoise-shell and bright coral, clusters of roses, sprays of white lilac, bouquets of pale violets, await the choice of the artist or the caprice of the beauty. And yet, must I say it? amidst this luxury of wealth Madame's hair is undressed, Madame is uneasy, Madame is furious.

Monsieur—(looking at his watch)—Well, my dear, is your hair dressed?

Madame—(impatiently)—He asks me whether my hair is dressed? Don't you see that I have been waiting for the hairdresser for an hour and a half? Can't you see that I am furious, for he won't come, the horrid wretch?

Monsieur—The monster!

Madame—Yes, the monster; and I would advise you not to joke about it.

There is a ring. The door opens and the lady's-maid exclaims, "It is he, Madame!"

Madame—It is he!

Monsieur—It is he!

The artist enters hurriedly and bows while turning his sleeves up.

Madame—My dear Silvani, this is unbearable.

Silvani—Very sorry, very, but could not come any sooner. I have been dressing hair since three o'clock in the afternoon. I have just left the Duchesse de W., who is going to the Ministry this evening. She sent me home in her brougham. Lisette, give me your mistress's combs, and put the curling-tongs in the fire.

Madame—But, my dear Silvani, my maid's name is not Lisette.

Silvani—You will understand, Madame, that if I had to remember the names of all the lady's-maids who help me, I should need six clerks instead of four. Lisette is a pretty name which suits all these young ladies very well. Lisette, show me your mistress's dress. Good. Is the ball an official one?

Madame—But dress my hair, Silvani.



Silvani—It is impossible for me to dress your hair, Madame, unless I know the circle in which the coiffure will be worn. (To the husband, seated in the corner.) May I beg you, Monsieur, to take another place? I wish to be able to step back, the better to judge the effect.

Monsieur—Certainly, Monsieur Silvani, only too happy to be agreeable to you. (He sits down on a chair.)

Madame—(hastily)—Not there, my dear, you will rumple my skirt. (The husband gets up and looks for another seat.) Take care behind you, you are stepping on my bustle.

Monsieur—(turning round angrily)—Her bustle! her bustle!

Madame—Now you go upsetting my pins.

Silvani—May I beg a moment of immobility, Madame?

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Monsieur—Come, calm yourself, I will go into the drawing-room; is there a fire there?

Madame—(inattentively)—But, my dear, how can you expect a fire to be in the drawing-room?

Monsieur—I will go to my study, then.

Madame—There is none there, either. What do you want a fire in your study for? What a singular idea! High up, you know, Silvani, and a dash of disorder, it is all the rage.

Silvani—Would you allow a touch of brown under the eyes? That would enable me to idealize the coiffure.

Monsieur—(impatiently)—Marie, give me my top-coat and my cap. I will walk up and down in the anteroom. (Aside.) Madame de Lyr shall pay for this.

Silvani—(crimping)—I leave your ear uncovered, Madame; it would be a sin to veil it. It is like that of the Princesse de K., whose hair I dressed yesterday. Lisette, get the powder ready. Ears like yours, Madame, are not numerous.

Madame—You were saying—

Silvani—Would your ear, Madame, be so modest as not to listen?

Madame's hair is at length dressed. Silvani sheds a light cloud of scented powder over his work, on which he casts a lingering look of satisfaction, then bows and retires.

In passing through the anteroom, he runs against Monsieur, who is walking up and down.

Silvani—A thousand pardons, I have the honor to wish you good night.

Monsieur—(from the depths of his turned-up collar) Good-night.

A quarter of an hour later the sound of a carriage is heard. Madame is ready, her coiffure suits her, she smiles at herself in the glass as she slips the glove-stretchers into the twelve-button gloves.

Monsieur has made a failure of his necktie and broken off three buttons. Traces of decided ill-humor are stamped on his features.

Monsieur—Come, let us go down, the carriage is waiting; it is a quarter past eleven. (Aside.) Another sleepless night. Sharp, coachman; Rue de la Pepiniere, number 224.



They reach the street in question. The Rue de la Pepiniere is in a tumult. Policemen are hurriedly making way through the crowd. In the distance, confused cries and a rapidly approaching, rumbling sound are heard. Monsieur thrusts his head out of the window.

Monsieur—What is it, Jean?

Coachman—A fire, Monsieur; here come the firemen.

Monsieur—Go on all the same to number 224.

Coachman—We are there, Monsieur; the fire is at number 224.

Doorkeeper of the House—(quitting a group of people and approaching the carriage)—You are, I presume, Monsieur, one of the guests of Madame de Lyr? She is terror-stricken; the fire is in her rooms. She can not receive any one.

Madame—(excitedly)—It is scandalous.

Monsieur—(humming)—Heart-breaking, heartbreaking! (To the coachman.) Home again, quickly; I am all but asleep. (He stretches himself out and turns up his collar.) (Aside.) After all, I am the better for a well-cooked partridge.

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CHAPTER XVI

A FALSE ALARM

Every time I visit Paris, which, unhappily, is too often, it rains in torrents. It makes no difference whether I change the time of starting from that which I had fixed upon at first, stop on the way, travel at night, resort, in short, to a thousand devices to deceive the barometer-at ten leagues from Paris the clouds begin to pile up and I get out of the train amidst a general deluge.

On the occasion of my last visit I found myself as usual in the street, followed by a street porter carrying my luggage and addressing despairing signals to all the cabs trotting quickly past amid the driving rain. After ten minutes of futile efforts a driver, more sensible than the others, and hidden in his triple cape, checks his horses. With a single bound I am beside the cab, and opening, the door with a kind of frenzy, jump in.

Unfortunately, while I am accomplishing all this on one side, a gentleman, similarly circumstanced, opens the other door and also jumps in. It is easy to understand that there ensues a collision.

“Devil take you!” said my rival, apparently inclined to push still farther forward.

I was about to answer him, and pretty sharply, too, for I hail from the south of France and am rather hotheaded, when our eyes met. We looked one another in the face like two lions over a single sheep, and suddenly we both burst out laughing. This angry gentleman was Oscar V., that dear good fellow Oscar, whom I had not seen for ten years, and who is a very old friend of mine, a charming fellow whom I used to play with as a boy.

We embraced, and the driver, who was looking at us through the window, shrugged his shoulders, unable to understand it all. The two porters, dripping with water, stood, one at each door, with a trunk on his shoulder. We had the luggage put on the cab and drove off to the Hotel du Louvre, where Oscar insisted on dropping me.

“But you are travelling, too, then?” said I to my friend, after the first moments of expansion. “Don’t you live in Paris?”

“I live in it as little as possible and have just come up from Les Roches, an old-fashioned little place I inherited from my father, at which I pass a great deal of the year. Oh! it is not a chateau; it is rustic, countrified, but I like it, and would not change anything about it. The country around is fresh and green, a clear little river flows past about forty yards from the house, amid the trees; there is a mill in the background, a spreading valley, a steeple and its weather-cock on the horizon, flowers under the windows, and happiness in the house. Can I grumble? My wife makes exquisite pastry,



which is very agreeable to me and helps to whiten her hands. By the way, I did not tell you that I am married. My dear fellow, I came across an angel, and I rightly thought that if I let her slip I should not find her equal. I did wisely. But I want to introduce you to my wife and to show you my little place. When will you come and see me? It is three hours from Paris—time to smoke a couple of cigars. It is settled, then—I am going back tomorrow morning and I will have a room ready for you. Give me your card and I will write down my address on it.”

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All this was said so cordially that I could not resist my friend's invitation, and promised to visit him.

Three or four days later, Paris being empty and the recollection of my old companion haunting me, I felt a strong desire to take a peep at his conjugal felicity and to see with my own eyes this stream, this mill, this steeple, beside all which he was so happy.

I reached Les Roches at about six in the evening and was charmed at the very first glance. Oscar's residence was a little Louis Quinze chateau buried in the trees; irregularly built, but charmingly picturesque. It had been left unaltered for a century at least, and everything, from the blackened mansard roofs with their rococo weather-cocks, to the bay windows with their tiny squares of glass and the fantastic escutcheon over the door, was in keeping. Over the thick tiles of the somewhat sunken roof, the rough-barked old chestnuts lazily stretched their branches. Creepers and climbing roses wantoned over the front, framing the windows, peeping into the garrets, and clinging to the waterspouts, laden with large bunches of flowers which swayed gently in the air. Amid all these pointed roofs and this profusion of verdure and trees the blue sky could only be caught a glimpse of here and there.

The first person I saw was Oscar, clad in white from head to foot, and wearing a straw hat. He was seated on an enormous block of stone which seemed part and parcel of the house, and appeared very much interested in a fine melon which his gardener had just brought to him. No sooner had he caught sight of me than he darted forward and grasped me by the hand with such an expression of good-humor and affection that I said to myself, "Yes, certainly he was not deceiving me, he is happy." I found him just as I had known him in his youth, lively, rather wild, but kind and obliging.

"Pierre," said he to the gardener, "take this gentleman's portmanteau to the lower room," and, as the gardener bestirred himself slowly and with an effort, Oscar seized the portmanteau and swung it, with a jerk, on to the shoulders of the poor fellow, whose legs bent under the weight.

"Lazybones," said Oscar, laughing heartily. "Ah! now I must introduce you to my little queen. My wife, where is my wife?"

He ran to the bell and pulled it twice. At once a fat cook with a red face and tucked-up sleeves, and behind her a man-servant wiping a plate, appeared at the ground-floor windows. Had they been chosen on purpose? I do not know, but their faces and bearing harmonized so thoroughly with the picture that I could not help smiling.

"Where is your mistress?" asked Oscar, and as they did not answer quickly enough he exclaimed, "Marie, Marie, here is my friend George."

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A young girl, fair as a lily, appeared at a narrow, little window, the one most garlanded by, flowers, on the first floor. She was clad in a white dressing-gown of some particular shape; I could not at first make out. With one hand she gathered its folds about her, and with the other restrained her flowing hair. Hardly had she seen me when she blushed, somewhat ashamed, no doubt, at having been surprised in the midst of her toilet, and, giving a most embarrassed yet charming bow; hurriedly disappeared. This vision completed the charm; it seemed to me that I had suddenly been transported into fairy-land. I had fancied when strapping my portmanteau that I should find my friend Oscar installed in one of those pretty, little, smart-looking houses, with green shutters and gilt lightning-conductor, dear to the countrified Parisian, and here I found myself amid an ideal blending of time-worn stones hidden in flowers, ancient gables, and fanciful ironwork reddened by rust. I was right in the midst of one of Morin's sketches, and, charmed and stupefied, I stood for some moments with my eyes fixed on the narrow window at which the fair girl had disappeared.

"I call her my little queen," said Oscar, taking my arm. "It is my wife. Come this way, we shall meet my cousin who is fishing, and two other friends who are strolling about in this direction, good fellows, only they do not understand the country as I do—they have on silk stockings and pumps, but it does not matter, does it? Would you like a pair of slippers or a straw hat?"

"I hope you have brought some linen jackets. I won't offer you a glass of Madeira—we shall dine at once. Ah! my dear fellow, you have turned up at the right moment; we are going to taste the first melon of the year this evening."

"Unfortunately, I never eat melons, though I like to see others do so."

"Well, then, I will offer you consolation by seeking out a bottle of my old Pomard for you. Between ourselves, I don't give it to every one; it is a capital wine which my poor father recommended to me on his deathbed; poor father, his eyes were closed, and his head stretched back on the pillow. I was sitting beside his bed, my hand in his, when I felt it feebly pressed. His eyes half opened, and I saw him smile. Then he said in a weak, slow, and the quavering voice of an old man who is dying: 'The Pomard at the farther end—on the left—you know, my boy—only for friends.' He pressed my hand again, and, as if exhausted, closed his eyes, though I could see by the imperceptible motion of his lips that he was still smiling inwardly. Come with me to the cellar," continued Oscar, after a brief silence, "at the farther end to the left, you shall hold the lantern for me."

When we came up from the cellar, the bell was ringing furiously, and flocks of startled birds were flying out of the chestnut-trees. It was for dinner. All the guests were in the garden. Oscar introduced me in his off-hand way, and I offered my arm to the mistress of the house to conduct her to the dining-room.

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On examining my friend's wife, I saw that my first impression had not been erroneous—she was literally a little angel, and a little angel in the shape of a woman, which is all the better. She was delicate, slender as a young girl; her voice was as thrilling and harmonious as the chaffinch, with an indefinable accent that smacked of no part of the country in particular, but lent a charm to her slightest word. She had, moreover, a way of speaking of her own, a childish and coquettish way of modulating the ends of her sentences and turning her eyes toward her husband, as if to seek for his approbation. She blushed every moment, but at the same time her smile was so bewitching and her teeth so white that she seemed to be laughing at herself. A charming little woman! Add to this a strange yet tasteful toilette, rather daring, perhaps, but suiting this little queen, so singular in herself. Her beautiful fair hair, twisted up apparently at hazard, was fixed rather high up on the head by a steel comb worn somewhat on one side; and her white muslin dress trimmed with wide, flat ruches, cut square at the neck, short in the skirt, and looped up all round, had a delicious eighteenth-century appearance. The angel was certainly a trifle coquettish, but in her own way, and yet her way was exquisite.

Hardly were we seated at table when Oscar threw toward his little queen a rapid glance, but one so full of happiness and—why should I not say it?—love that I experienced a kind of shiver, a thrill of envy, astonishment, and admiration, perhaps. He took from the basket of flowers on the table a red rose, scarcely opened, and, pushing it toward her, said with a smile:

“For your hair, Madame.”

The fair girl blushed deeply, took the flower, and, without hesitation, quickly and dexterously stuck it in her hair, high up on the left, just in the right spot, and, delightedly turning round to each of us, repeated several times, amid bursts of laughter, “Is it right like that?”

Then she wafted a tiny kiss with the tips of her fingers to her husband, as a child of twelve would have done, and gayly plunged her spoon into the soup, turning up her little finger as she did so.

The other guests had nothing very remarkable about them; they laughed very good-naturedly at these childish ways, but seemed somewhat out of place amid all this charming freedom from restraint. The cousin, above all, the angler, with his white waistcoat, his blue tie, his full beard, and his almond eyes, especially displeased me. He rolled his r's like an actor at a country theatre. He broke his bread into little bits and nibbled them as he talked. I divined that the pleasure of showing off a large ring he wore had something to do with this fancy for playing with his bread. Once or twice I caught a glance of melancholy turned toward the mistress of the house, but at first I did not take much notice of it, my attention being attracted by the brilliant gayety of Oscar.

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After dinner, which lasted a very long time, we went into the garden, where coffee had been served, and stretched ourselves out beatifically, cigar in mouth. All was calm and silent about us, the insects had ceased their music, and in an opaline sky little violet clouds were sleeping.

Oscar, with a happy air, pointed out to me the famous mill, the quiet valley, and farther on his loved stream, in which the sun, before setting, was reflecting itself amid the reeds. Meanwhile the little queen on her high heels flitted round the cups like a child playing at party-giving, and with a thousand charming touches poured out the boiling coffee, the odor of which blended deliciously with the perfume of the flowers, the hay, and the woods.

When she had finished she sat down beside her husband, so close that her skirt half hid my friend, and unceremoniously taking the cigar from his lips, held it at a distance, with a little pout, that meant, "Oh, the horrid thing!" and knocked off with her little finger the ash which fell on the gravel. Then she broke into a laugh, and put the cigar back between the lips of her husband held out to her.

It was charming. Oscar was no doubt accustomed to this, for he did not seem astonished, but placed his hand on his wife's shoulder, as one would upon a child's, and, kissing her on the forehead, said, "Thanks, my dear."

"Yes, but you are only making fun of me," said the young wife, in a whisper, leaning her head against her husband's arm.

I could not help smiling, there was so much coaxing childishness and grace in this little whispered sentence. I do not know why I turned toward the cousin who had remained a little apart, smoking in silence. He seemed to me rather pale; he took three or four sudden puffs, rose suddenly under the evident influence of some moral discomfort, and walked away beneath the trees.

"What is the matter with cousin?" said Oscar, with some interest. "What ails him?"

"I don't know," answered the little queen, in the most natural manner in the world, "some idea about fishing, no doubt."

Night began to fall; we had remained as I have said a long time at table. It was about nine o'clock. The cousin returned and took the seat he had occupied before, but from this moment it seemed to me that a strange constraint crept in among us, a singular coolness showed itself. The talk, so lively at first, slackened gradually and, despite all my efforts to impart a little life to it, dragged wretchedly. I myself did not feel very bright; I was haunted by the most absurd notions in the world; I thought I had detected in the sudden departure of the cousin, in his pallor, in his embarrassed movements, the expression of some strong feeling which he had been powerless to hide. But how was it

that that adorable little woman with such a keen intelligent look did not understand all this, since I understood it myself? Had not

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Oscar, however confiding he might be, noted that the departure of the cousin exactly coincided with the kiss he had given his wife? Were these two blind, or did they pretend not to see, or was I myself the victim of an illusion? However, conversation had died away; the mistress of the house, singular symptom, was silent and serious, and Oscar wriggled in his chair, like a man who is not altogether at ease. What was passing in their minds?

Soon we heard the clock in the drawing-room strike ten, and Oscar, suddenly rising, said: "My dear fellow, in the country it is Liberty Hall, you know; so I will ask your permission to go in—I am rather tired this evening. George," he added to me, "they will show you your room; it is on the ground floor; I hope that you will be comfortable there."

Everybody got up silently, and, after bidding one another good-night in a somewhat constrained manner, sought their respective rooms. I thought, I must acknowledge, that they went to bed rather too early at my friend's. I had no wish to sleep; I therefore examined my room, which was charming. It was completely hung with an old figured tapestry framed in gray wainscot. The bed, draped in dimity curtains, was turned down and exhaled that odor of freshly washed linen which invites one to stretch one's self in it. On the table, a little gem dating from the beginning of the reign of Louis XVI, were four or five books, evidently chosen by Oscar and placed there for me. These little attentions touch one, and naturally my thoughts recurred to the dear fellow, to the strange incident of the evening, to the vexations and tortures hidden, perhaps, by this apparent happiness. I was ridiculous that night—I already pitied him, my poor friend.

I felt quite touched, and, full of melancholy, went and leaned against the sill of the open window. The moon had just risen, the sky was beautifully clear, whiffs of delicious perfumes assailed my nostrils. I saw in the shadow of the trees glowworms sparkling on the grass, and, in the masses of verdure lit up mysteriously by the moon, I traced strange shapes of fantastic monsters. There was, above all, a little pointed roof surmounted by a weathercock, buried in the trees at about fifty paces from my window, which greatly interested me. I could not in the obscurity make out either door or windows belonging to this singular tower. Was it an old pigeon-house, a tomb, a deserted summer-house? I could not tell, but its little pointed roof, with a round dormer window, was extremely graceful. Was it chance or an artist lull of taste that had covered this tower with creepers and flowers, and surrounded it with foliage in such capricious fashion that it seemed to be hiding itself in order to catch all glances? I was gazing at all this when I heard a faint noise in the shrubbery. I looked in that direction and I saw—really, it was an anxious moment—I saw a phantom clad in a white robe and walking with mysterious and agitated rapidity. At a turning of the path the moon shone on this phantom. Doubt was impossible; I had before my eyes my friend's wife. Her gait no longer had that coquettish ease which I had noticed, but clearly indicated the agitation due to some strong emotion.

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I strove to banish the horrible suspicion which suddenly forced itself into my mind. “No,” I said to myself, “so much innocence and beauty can not be capable of deception; no doubt she has forgotten her fan or her embroidery, on one of the benches there.” But instead of making her way toward the benches I noticed on the right, the young wife turned to the left, and soon disappeared in the shadow of the grove in which was hidden the mysterious turret.

My heart ached. “Where is she going, the hapless woman?” I exclaimed to myself. “At any rate, I will not let her imagine any one is watching her.” And I hurriedly blew out my candle. I wanted to close my window, go to bed, and see nothing more, but an invincible curiosity took me back to the window. I had only been there a few minutes when I plainly distinguished halting and timid footsteps on the gravel. I could see no one at first, but there was no doubt that the footsteps were those of a man. I soon had a proof that I was not mistaken; the elongated outline of the cousin showed up clearly against the dark mass of shrubbery. I should have liked to have stopped him, the wretch, for his intention was evident; he was making his way toward the thicket in which the little queen had disappeared. I should have liked to shout to him, “You are a villain; you shall go no farther.” But had I really any right to act thus? I was silent, but I coughed, however, loud enough to be heard by him.

He suddenly paused in his uneasy walk, looked round on all sides with visible anxiety, then, seized by I know not what impulse, darted toward the pavilion. I was overwhelmed. What ought I to do? Warn my friend, my childhood’s companion? Yes, no doubt, but I felt ashamed to pour despair into the mind of this good fellow and to cause a horrible exposure. “If he can be kept in ignorance,” I said to myself, “and then perhaps I am wrong—who knows? Perhaps this rendezvous is due to the most natural motive possible.”

I was seeking to deceive myself, to veil the evidence of my own eyes, when suddenly one of the house doors opened noisily, and Oscar—Oscar himself, in all the disorder of night attire, his hair ruffled, and his dressing-gown floating loosely, passed before my window. He ran rather than walked; but the anguish of his heart was too plainly revealed in the strangeness of his movements. He knew all. I felt that a mishap was inevitable. “Behold the outcome of all his happiness, behold the bitter poison enclosed in so fair a vessel!” All these thoughts shot through my mind like arrows. It was necessary above all to delay the explosion, were it only for a moment, a second, and, beside myself, without giving myself time to think of what I was going to say to him, I cried in a sharp imperative tone:

“Oscar, come here; I want to speak to you.”

He stopped as if petrified. He was ghastly pale, and, with an infernal smile, replied, “I have no time—later on.”

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“Oscar, you must, I beg of you—you are mistaken.”

At these words he broke into a fearful laugh.

“Mistaken—mistaken!”

And he ran toward the pavilion.

Seizing the skirt of his dressing-gown, I held him tightly, exclaiming:

“Don’t go, my dear fellow, don’t go; I beg of you on my knees not to go.”

By way of reply he gave me a hard blow on the arm with his fist, exclaiming:

“What the devil is the matter with you?”

“I tell you that you can not go there, Oscar,” I said, in a voice which admitted of no contradiction.

“Then why did not you tell me at once.”

And feverishly snatching his dressing-gown from my grasp, he began to walk frantically up and down.

CHAPTER XVII

I SUP WITH MY WIFE

That evening, which chanced to be Christmas Eve, it was infernally cold. The snow was falling in heavy flakes, and, driven by the wind, beat furiously against the window panes. The distant chiming of the bells could just be heard through this heavy and woolly atmosphere. Foot-passengers, wrapped in their cloaks, slipped rapidly along, keeping close to the house and bending their heads to the wintry blast.

Enveloped in my dressing-gown, and tapping with my fingers on the window-panes, I was smiling at the half-frozen passers-by, the north wind, and the snow, with the contented look of a man who is in a warm room and has on his feet comfortable flannel-lined slippers, the soles of which are buried in a thick carpet. At the fireside my wife was cutting out something and smiling at me from time to time; a new book awaited me on the mantelpiece, and the log on the hearth kept shooting out with a hissing sound those little blue flames which invite one to poke it.

“There is nothing that looks more dismal than a man tramping through the snow, is there?” said I to my wife.

“Hush,” said she, lowering the scissors which she held in her hand; and, after smoothing her chin with her fingers, slender, rosy, and plump at their tips, she went on examining the pieces of stuff she had cut out.

“I say that it is ridiculous to go out in the cold when it is so easy to remain at home at one’s own fireside.”

“Hush.”

“But what are you doing that is so important?”

“I—I am cutting out a pair of braces for you,” and she set to work again. But, as in cutting out she kept her head bent, I noticed, on passing behind her, her soft, white neck, which she had left bare that evening by dressing her hair higher than usual. A number of little downy hairs were curling there. This kind of down made me think of those ripe peaches one bites so greedily. I drew near, the better to see, and I kissed the back of my wife’s neck.

“Monsieur!” said Louise, suddenly turning round.

“Madame,” I replied, and we both burst out laughing.

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"Christmas Eve," said I.

"Do you wish to excuse yourself and to go out?"

"Do you mean to complain?"

"Yes, I complain that you are not sufficiently impressed by the fact of its being Christmas Eve. The ding-ding-dong of the bells of Notre Dame fails to move you; and just now when the magic-lantern passed beneath the window, I looked at you while pretending to work, and you were quite calm."

"I remain calm when the magic-lantern is going by! Ah! my dear, you are very severe on me, and really—"

"Yes, yes, jest about it, but it was none the less true that the recollections of your childhood have failed."

"Now, my dear, do you want me to leave my boots out on the hearth this evening on going to bed? Do you want me to call in the magic-lantern man, and to look out a big sheet and a candle end for him, as my poor mother used to do? I can still see her as she used to entrust her white sheet to him. 'Don't make a hole in it, at least,' she would say. How we used to clap our hands in the mysterious darkness! I can recall all those joys, my dear, but you know so many other things have happened since then. Other pleasures have effaced those."

"Yes, I can understand, your bachelor pleasures; and, there, I am sure that this Christmas Eve is the first you have passed by your own fireside, in your dressing-gown, without supper; for you used to sup on Christmas Eve."

"To sup, to sup."

"Yes, you supped; I will wager you did."

"I have supped two or three times, perhaps, with friends, you know; two sous' worth of roasted chestnuts and—"

"A glass of sugar and water."

"Oh, pretty nearly so. It was all very simple; as far as I can recollect. We chatted a little and went to bed."

"And he says that without a smile. You have never breathed a word to me of all these simple pleasures."



“But, my dear, all that I am telling you is strictly true. I remember that once, however, it was rather lively. It was at Ernest’s, and we had some music. Will you push that log toward me? But, never mind; it will soon be midnight, and that is the hour when reasonable people—”

Louise, rising and throwing her arms around my neck, interrupted me with: “Well, I don’t want to be reasonable, I want to wipe out all your memories of chestnuts and glasses of sugar and water.”

Then pushing me into my dressing-room she locked the door.

“But, my dear, what is the matter with you?” said I through the keyhole.

“I want ten minutes, no more. Your newspaper is on the mantelpiece; you have not read it this evening. There are some matches in the corner.”

I heard a clatter of crockery, a rustling of silk my wife mad?

Louise soon came and opened the door.

“Don’t scold me for having shut you up,” she said, kissing me. “Look how I have beautified myself? Do you recognize the coiffure you are so fond of, the chignon high, and the neck bare? Only as my poor neck is excessively timid, it would have never consented to show itself thus if I had not encouraged it a little by wearing my dress low. And then one must put on full uniform to sup with the authorities.”

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"To sup?"

"Certainly, to sup with you; don't you see my illuminations and this table covered with flowers and a heap of good things? I had got it all ready in the alcove; but you understand that to roll the table up to the fire and make a little toilette, I wanted to be alone. Come, Monsieur, take your place at table. I am as hungry as a hunter. May I offer you a wing of cold chicken?"

"Your idea is charming, but, dear, really I am ashamed; I am in my dressing-gown."

"Take off your dressing-gown if it incommodes you, Monsieur, but don't leave this chicken wing on my hands. I want to serve you myself." And, rising, she turned her sleeves up to the elbow, and placed her table napkin on her arm.

"It is thus that the waiters at the restaurant do it, is it not?"

"Exactly; but, waiter, allow me at least to kiss your hand."

"I have no time," said she, laughing, sticking the corkscrew into the neck of the bottle. "Chambertin—it is a pretty name; and then do you remember that before our marriage (how hard this cork is!) you told me that you liked it on account of a poem by Alfred de Musset? which, by the way, you have not let me read yet. Do you see the two little Bohemian glasses which I bought expressly for this evening? We will drink each other's health in them."

"And his, too, eh?"

"The heir's, poor dear love of an heir! I should think so. And then I will put away the two glasses against this time next year; they shall be our Christmas Eve glasses? Every year we will sup like this together, however old we may get."

"But, my dear, how about the time when we have no longer any teeth?"

"Well, we will sup on good strong soups; it will be very nice, all the same. Another piece, please, with some of the jelly. Thanks."

As she held out her plate I noticed her arm, the outline of which was lost in lace.

"Why are you looking up my sleeve instead of eating?"

"I am looking at your arm, dear. You are charming, let me tell you, this evening. That coiffure suits you so well, and that dress which I was unacquainted with."

"Well, when one seeks to make a conquest—"

“How pretty you look, pet!”

“Is it true that you think me charming, pretty, and a pet this evening? Well, then,” lowering her eyes and smiling at her bracelets, “in that case I do not see why—”

“What is it you do not see, dear?”

“I do not see any reason why you should not come and give me just a little kiss.”

And as the kiss was prolonged, she said to me, amid bursts of laughter, her head thrown back, and showing the double row of her white teeth: “I should like some pie; yes, some brie! You will break my Bohemian glass, the result of my economy. You always cause some mishap when you want to kiss me. Do you recollect at Madame de Brill’s ball, two days before our marriage, how you tore my skirt while waltzing in the little drawing-room?”

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“Because it is difficult to do two things at once—to keep step and to kiss one’s partner.”

“I recollect, too, when mamma asked how my skirt had got torn, I felt that I was blushing up to my ears. And Madame D., that old jaundiced fairy, who said to me with her Lenten smile, ‘How flushed you are tonight, my dear child!’ I could have strangled her! I said it was the key of the door that had caught it. I looked at you out of the corner of my eye; you were pulling your moustache and seemed greatly annoyed—you are keeping all the truffles for yourself; that is kind—not that one; I want the big black one there in the corner—it was very wrong all the same, for—oh! not quite full—I do not want to be tipsy—for, after all, if we had not been married—and that might have happened, for you know they say that marriages only depend on a thread. Well, if the thread had not been strong enough, I should have remained a maid with a kiss on my shoulder, and a nice thing that would have been.”

“Bah! it does not stain.”

“Yes, Monsieur, it does, I beg your pardon. It stains so much that there are husbands, I believe, who even shed their blood to wash out such little stains.”

“But I was joking, dear. Hang it!—don’t you think—yes, certainly, hang it!”

“Ah! that’s right, I like to see you angry. You are a trifle jealous, dear—oh! that is too bad; I asked you for the big black one, and you have gone and eaten it.”

“I am sorry, dear; I quite forgot about it.”

“It was the same at the Town Hall, where I was obliged to jog your elbow to make you answer ‘Yes’ to the Mayor’s kind words.”

“Kind!”

“Yes, kind. I thought him charming. No one could have been more graceful than he was in addressing me. ‘Mademoiselle, will you consent to accept for your husband that great, ugly fellow standing beside you?’” (Laughing, with her mouth full.) “I wanted to say to him, ‘Let us come to an understanding, Mr. Mayor; there is something to be said on either side.’ I am choking!”—she bursts out laughing—“I was wrong not to impose restrictions. Your health, dear! I am teasing you; it is very stupid. I said ‘Yes’ with all my heart, I can assure you, dear, and I thought the word too weak a one. When I think that all women, even the worst, say that word, I feel ashamed not to have found another.” Holding out her glass: “To our golden wedding—will you touch glasses?”

“And to his baptism, little mamma.”

In a low voice: “Tell me—are you sorry you married me?”

Laughing, “Yes.” Kissing her on the shoulder, “I think I have found the stain again; it was just there.”

“It is two in the morning, the fire is out, and I am a little—you won’t laugh now? Well, I am a little dizzy.”

“A capital pie, eh?”

“A capital pie! We shall have a cup of tea for breakfast tomorrow, shall we not?”

CHAPTER XVIII



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FROM ONE THING TO ANOTHER

Scene.—The country in autumn—The wind is blowing without—*madame*, seated by the fireside in a large armchair, is engaged in needlework —*monsieur*, seated in front of her, is watching the flames of the fire—A long silence.

Monsieur—Will you pass me the poker, my dear?

Madame—(humming to herself)—“And yet despite so many fears.” (Spoken.) Here is the poker. (Humming.) “Despite the painful——”

Monsieur—That is by Mehul, is it not, my dear? Ah! that is music—I saw Delaunay Riquier in Joseph. (He hums as he makes up the fire.) “Holy pains.” (Spoken.) One wonders why it does not burn, and, by Jove! it turns out to be green wood. Only he was a little too robust—Riquier. A charming voice, but he is too stout.

Madame—(holding her needlework at a distance, the better to judge of the effect)—Tell me, George, would you have this square red or black? You see, the square near the point. Tell me frankly.

Monsieur—(singing) “If you can repent.” (Spoken without turning his head.) Red, my dear; red. I should not hesitate; I hate black.

Madame—Yes, but if I make that red it will lead me to—(She reflects.)

Monsieur—Well, my dear, if it leads you away, you must hold fast to something to save yourself.

Madame—Come, George, I am speaking seriously. You know that if this little square is red, the point can not remain violet, and I would not change that for anything.

Monsieur—(slowly and seriously)—My dear, will you follow the advice of an irreproachable individual, to whose existence you have linked your fate? Well, make that square pea-green, and so no more about it. Just look whether a coal fire ever looked like that.

Madame—I should only be too well pleased to use up my pea-green wool; I have a quantity of it.

Monsieur—Then where lies the difficulty?

Madame—The difficulty is that pea-green is not sufficiently religious.

Monsieur—Hum! (Humming.) Holy pains! (Spoken.) Will you be kind enough to pass the bellows? Would it be indiscreet to ask why the poor pea-green, which does not look

very guilty, has such an evil reputation? You are going in for religious needlework, then, my dear?

Madame—Oh, George! I beg of you to spare me your fun. I have been familiar with it for a long time, you know, and it is horribly disagreeable to me. I am simply making a little mat for the confessional-box of the vicar. There! are you satisfied? You know what it is for, and you must understand that under the present circumstances pea-green would be altogether out of place.

Monsieur—Not the least in the world. I can swear to you that I could just as well confess with pea-green under my feet. It is true that I am naturally of a resolute disposition. Use up your wool; I can assure you that the vicar will accept it all the same. He does not know how to refuse. (He plies the bellows briskly.)

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Madame—You are pleased, are you not?

Monsieur—Pleased at what, dear?

Madame—Pleased at having vented your sarcasm, at having passed a jest on one who is absent. Well, I tell you that you are a bad man, seeing that you seek to shake the faith of those about you. My beliefs had need be very fervent, principles strong, and have real virtue, to resist these incessant attacks. Well, why are you looking at me like that?

Monsieur—I want to be converted, my little apostle. You are so pretty when you speak out; your eyes glisten, your voice rings, your gestures—I am sure that you could speak like that for a long time, eh? (He kisses her hand, and takes two of her curls and ties them under her chin.) You are looking pretty, my pet.

Madame—Oh! you think you have reduced me to silence because you have interrupted me. Ah! there, you have tangled my hair. How provoking you are! It will take me an hour to put it right. You are not satisfied with being a prodigy of impiety, but you must also tangle my hair. Come, hold out your hands and take this skein of wool.

Monsieur—(sitting down on a stool, which he draws as closely as possible to Madame, and holding up his hands) My little Saint John!

Madame—Not so close, George; not so close. (She smiles despite herself.) How silly you are! Please be careful; you will break my wool.

Monsieur—Your religious wool.

Madame—Yes, my religious wool. (She gives him a little pat on the cheek.) Why do you part your hair so much on one side, George? It would suit you much better in the middle, here. Yes, you may kiss me, but gently.

Monsieur—Can you guess what I am thinking of?

Madame—How do you imagine I could guess that?

Monsieur—Well, I am thinking of the barometer which is falling and of the thermometer which is falling too.

Madame—You see, cold weather is coming on and my mat will never be finished. Come, let us make haste.

Monsieur—I was thinking of the thermometer which is falling and of my room which faces due north.



Madame—Did you not choose it yourself? My wool! Good gracious! my wool! Oh! the wicked wretch!

Monsieur—In summer my room with the northern aspect is, no doubt, very pleasant; but when autumn comes, when the wind creeps in, when the rain trickles down the windowpanes, when the fields, the country, seem hidden under a huge veil of sadness, when the spoils of our woodlands strew the earth, when the groves have lost their mystery and the nightingale her voice—oh! then the room with the northern aspect has a very northern aspect, and—

Madame—(continuing to wind her wool)—What nonsense you are talking!

Monsieur—I protest against autumns, that is all. God's sun is hidden and I seek another. Is not that natural, my little fairhaired saint, my little mystic lamb, my little blessed palmbranch? This new sun I find in you, pet—in your look, in the sweet odor of your person, in the rustling of your skirt, in the down on your neck which one notices by the lamp-light when you bend over the vicar's mat, in your nostril which expands when my lips approach yours—

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Madame—Will you be quiet, George? It is Friday, and Ember week.

Monsieur—And your dispensation? (He kisses her.) Don't you see that your hand shakes, that you blush, that your heart is beating?

Madame—George, will you have done, sir? (She pulls away her hand, throws herself back in the chair, and avoids her husband's glance.)

Monsieur—Your poor little heart beats, and it is right, dear; it knows that autumn is the time for confidential chats and evening caresses, the time for kisses. And you know it too, for you defend yourself poorly, and I defy you to look me in the face. Come! look me in the face.

Madame—(she suddenly leans toward her husband, the ball of wool rolling into the fireplace, the pious task falling to the ground. She takes his head between her hands) —Oh, what a dear, charming husband you would be if you had—

Monsieur—If I had what? Tell me quickly.

Madame—If you had a little religion. I should only ask for such a little at the beginning. It is not very difficult, I can assure you. While, now, you are really too—

Monsieur—Pea-green, eh?

Madame—Yes, pea-green, you great goose. (She laughs frankly.)

Monsieur—(lifting his hands in the air)—Sound trumpets! Madame has laughed; Madame is disarmed. Well, my snowwhite lamb, I am going to finish my story; listen properly, there, like that—your hands here, my head so. Hush! don't laugh. I am speaking seriously. As I was saying to you, the north room is large but cold, poetic but gloomy, and I will add that two are not too many in this wintry season to contend against the rigors of the night. I will further remark that if the sacred ties of marriage have a profoundly social significance, it is—do not interrupt me—at that hour of one's existence when one shivers on one's solitary couch.

Madame—You can not be serious.

Monsieur—Well, seriously, I should like the vicar's mat piously spread upon your bed, to keep us both warm together, this very evening. I wish to return as speedily as possible to the intimacy of conjugal life. Do you hear how the wind blows and whistles through the doors? The fire splutters, and your feet are frozen. (He takes her foot in his hands.)

Madame—But you are taking off my slipper, George.



Monsieur—Do you think, my white lamb, that I am going to leave your poor little foot in that state? Let it stay in my hand to be warmed. Nothing is so cold as silk. What! openwork stockings? My dear, you are rather dainty about your foot-gear for a Friday. Do you know, pet, you can not imagine how gay I wake up when the morning sun shines into my room. You shall see. I am no longer a man; I am a chaffinch; all the joys of spring recur to me. I laugh, I sing, I speechify, I tell tales to make one die of laughter. Sometimes I even dance.

Madame—Come now! I who in the morning like neither noise nor broad daylight—how little all that suits!

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Monsieur—(suddenly changing his tone)—Did I say that I liked all that? The morning sun? Never in autumn, my sweet dove, never. I awake, on the contrary full of languor and poesy; I was like that in my very cradle. We will prolong the night, and behind the drawn curtain, behind the closed shutter, we will remain asleep without sleeping. Buried in silence and shadow, delightfully stretched beneath your warm eider-down coverlets, we will slowly enjoy the happiness of being together, and we will wish one another good-morning only on the stroke of noon. You do not like noise, dear. I will not say a word. Not a murmur to disturb your unfinished dream and warn you that you are no longer sleeping; not a breath to recall you to reality; not a movement to rustle the coverings. I will be silent as a shade, motionless as a statue; and if I kiss you—for, after all, I have my weaknesses—it will be done with a thousand precautions, my lips will scarcely brush your sleeping shoulder; and if you quiver with pleasure as you stretch out your arms, if your eye half uncloses at the murmur of my kiss, if your lips smile at me, if I kiss you, it would be because you would like me to, and I shall have nothing to reproach myself with.

Madame—(her eyes half closed, leaning back in her armchair, her head bent with emotion, she places her hands before his mouth. In a low voice)—Hush, hush! Don't say that, dear; not another word! If you knew how wrong it was!

Monsieur—Wrong! What is there that is wrong? Is your heart of marble or adamant, that you do not see that I love you, you naughty child? That I hold out my arms to you, that I long to clasp you to my heart, and to fall asleep in your hair? What is there more sacred in the world than to love one's wife or love one's husband? (Midnight strikes.)

Madame—(she suddenly changes her expression at the sound, throws her arms round her husband, and hurriedly kisses him thrice)—You thought I did not love you, eh, dear? Oh, yes! I love you. Great baby! not to see that I was waiting the time.

Monsieur—What time, dear?

Madame—The time. It has struck twelve, see. (She blushes crimson.) Friday is over. (She holds out her hand for him to kiss.)

Monsieur—Are you sure the clock is not five minutes fast, love?

CHAPTER XIX

A LITTLE CHAT

Madame F-----madame H-----

(These ladies are seated at needlework as they talk.)

Madame F—For myself, you know, my dear, I fulfil my duties tolerably, still I am not what would be called a devotee. By no means. Pass me your scissors. Thanks.

Madame H—You are quite welcome, dear. What a time those little squares of lace must take. I am like yourself in respect of religion; in the first place, I think that nothing should be overdone. Have you ever—I have never spoken to any one on the subject, but I see your ideas are so in accordance with my own that—

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Madame F—Come, speak out, dear; you trust me a little, I hope.

Madame H—Well, then, have you—tell me truly—ever had any doubts?

Madame F—(after reflecting for a moment)—Doubts! No. And you?

Madame H—I have had doubts, which has been a real grief to me. Heavens! how I have wept.

Madame F—I should think so, my poor dear. For my own part, my faith is very strong. These doubts must have made you very unhappy.

Madame H—Terribly so. You know, it seems as if everything failed you; there is a vacancy all about you—I have never spoken about it to my husband, of course—Leon is a jewel of a man, but he will not listen to anything of that kind. I can still see him, the day after our marriage; I was smoothing my hair—broad bands were then worn, you know.

Madame F—Yes, yes; they were charming. You will see that we shall go back to them.

Madame H—I should not be surprised; fashion is a wheel that turns. Leon, then, said to me the day after our wedding: “My dear child, I shall not hinder you going to church, but I beg you, for mercy’s sake, never to say a word to me about it.”

Madame F—Really, Monsieur H. said that to you?

Madame H—Upon my honor. Oh! my husband is all that is most—or, if you prefer it, all that is least—

Madame F—Yes, yes, I understand. That is a grief, you know. Mine is only indifferent. From time to time he says some disagreeable things to me on the question, but I am sure he could be very easily brought back to the right. At the first illness he has, you shall see. When he has only a cold in the head, I notice the change. You have not seen my thimble?

Madame H—Here it is. Do not be too sure of that, dear; men are not to be brought back by going “chk, chk” to them, like little chickens. And then, though I certainly greatly admire the men who observe religious practices, you know me well enough not to doubt that—I think, as I told you, that nothing should be exaggerated. And yourself, pet, should you like to see your husband walking before the banner with a great wax taper in his right hand and a bouquet of flowers in his left?

Madame F—Oh! no, indeed. Why not ask me at once whether I should like to see Leon in a black silk skull cap, with cotton in his ears and a holy water sprinkler in his hand? One has no need to go whining about a church with one’s nose buried in a book to be a

pious person; there is a more elevated form of religion, which is that of—of refined people, you know.

Madame H—Ah! when you speak like that, I am of your opinion. I think, for instance, that there is nothing looks finer than a man while the host is being elevated. Arms crossed, no book, head slightly bowed, grave look, frock coat buttoned up. Have you seen Monsieur de P. at mass? How well he looks!

Madame F—He is such a fine man, and, then, he dresses so well. Have you seen him on horseback? Ah! so you have doubts; but tell me what they are, seeing we are indulging in confidences.

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Madame H—I can hardly tell you. Doubts, in short; about hell, for instance, I have had horrible doubts. Oh! but do not let us speak about that; I believe it is wrong even to think of it.

Madame F—I have very broad views on that point; I never think about it. Besides, my late confessor helped me. “Do not seek too much,” he always said to me, “do not try to understand that which is unfathomable.” You did not know Father Gideon? He was a jewel of a confessor; I was extremely pleased with him. Not too tedious, always discreet, and, above all, well-bred. He turned monk from a romantic cause—a penitent was madly in love with him.

Madame H—Impossible!

Madame F—Yes, really. What! did you not know about it? The success of the monastery was due to that accident. Before the coming of Father Gideon it vegetated, but on his coming the ladies soon flocked there in crowds. They organized a little guild, entitled “The Ladies of the Agony.” They prayed for the Chinese who had died without confession, and wore little death’s heads in aluminum as sleeve-links. It became very fashionable, as you are aware, and the good fathers organized, in turn, a registry for men servants; and the result is that, from one thing leading to another, the community has become extremely wealthy. I have even heard that one of the most important railway stations in Paris is shortly to be moved, so that the size of their garden can be increased, which is rather restricted at present.

Madame H—As to that, it is natural enough that men should want a place to walk in at home; but what I do not understand is that a woman, however pious she may be, should fall in love with a priest. It is all very well, but that is no longer piety; it is—fanaticism. I venerate priests, I can say so truly, but after all I can not imagine myself—you will laugh at me—ha, ha, ha!

Madame F—Not at all. Ha, ha, ha! what a child you are!

Madame H—(working with great briskness)—Well, I can not imagine that they are men—like the others.

Madame F—(resuming work with equal ardor)—And yet, my dear, people say they are.

Madame H—There are so many false reports set afloat. (A long silence.)

Madame F—(in a discreet tone of voice)—After all, there are priests who have beards—the Capuchins, for instance.

Madame H—Madame de V. has a beard right up to her eyes, so that counts for nothing, dear.



Madame F—That counts for nothing. I do not think so. In the first place, Madame de V.'s beard is not a perennial beard; her niece told me that she sheds her moustaches every autumn. What can a beard be that can not stand the winter? A mere trifle.

Madame H—A mere trifle that is horribly ugly, my dear.

Madame F—Oh! if Madame de V. had only moustaches to frighten away people, one might still look upon her without sorrow, but—

Madame H—I grant all that. Let us allow that the Countess's moustache and imperial are a nameless species of growth. I do not attach much importance to the point, you understand. She has a chin of heartbreaking fertility, that is all.

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Madame F—To return to what we were saying, how is it that the men who are strongest, most courageous, most manly—soldiers, in fact—are precisely those who have most beard?

Madame H—That is nonsense, for then the pioneers would be braver than the Generals; and, in any case, there is not in France, I am sure, a General with as much beard as a Capuchin. You have never looked at a Capuchin then?

Madame F—Oh, yes! I have looked at one quite close. It is a rather funny story. Fancy Clementine's cook having a brother a Capuchin—an ex-jeweller, a very decent man. In consequence of misfortunes in business—it was in 1848, business was at a stand-still—in short, he lost his senses—no, he did not lose his senses, but he threw himself into the arms of Heaven.

Madame H—Oh! I never knew that! When? Clementine—

Madame F—I was like you, I would not believe it, but one day Clementine said to me: “Since you will not believe in my Capuchin, come and see me tomorrow about three o'clock; he will be paying a visit to his sister. Don't have lunch first; we will lunch together.” Very good. I went the next day with Louise, who absolutely insisted upon accompanying me, and I found at Clementine's five or six ladies installed in the drawing-room and laughing like madcaps. They had all come to see the Capuchin. “Well,” said I, as I went in, when they all began to make signs to me and whisper, “Hush, hush!” He was in the kitchen.

Madame H—And what was he like?

Madame F—Oh! very nice, except his feet; you know how it always gives one a chill to look at their feet; but, in short, he was very amiable. He was sent for into the drawing-room, but he would not take anything except a little biscuit and a glass of water, which took away our appetites. He was very lively; told us that we were coquettes with our little bonnets and our full skirts. He was very funny, always a little bit of the jeweller at the bottom, but with plenty of good nature and frankness. He imitated the buzzing of a fly for us; it was wonderful. He also wanted to show us a little conjuring trick, but he needed two corks for it, and unfortunately his sister could only find one.

Madame H—No matter, I can not understand Clementine engaging a servant like that.

Madame F—Why? The brother is a guarantee.

Madame H—Of morality, I don't say no; but it seems to me that a girl like that can not be very discreet in her ways.

Madame F—How do you make that out?



Madame H—I don't know, I can not reason the matter out, but it seems to me that it must be so, that is all, . . . besides, I should not like to see a monk in my kitchen, close to the soup. Oh, mercy! no!

Madame F—What a child you are!

Madame H—That has nothing to do with religious feelings, my dear; I do not attack any dogma. Ah! if I were to say, for instance—come now, if I were to say, what now?

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Madame F—In point of fact, what really is dogma?

Madame H—Well, it is what can not be attacked. Thus, for instance, a thing that is evident, you understand me, is unassailable, . . . or else it should be assailed, . . . in short, it can not be attacked. That is why it is monstrous to allow the Jewish religion and the Protestant religion in France, because these religions can be assailed, for they have no dogma. I give you this briefly, but in your prayer-book you will find the list of dogmas. I am a rod of iron as regards dogmas. My husband, who, as I said, has succeeded in inspiring me with doubts on many matters—without imagining it, for he has never required anything of me; I must do him that justice—but who, at any rate, has succeeded in making me neglect many things belonging to religion, such as fasting, vespers, sermons, . . . confession.

Madame F—Confession! Oh! my dear, I should never have believed that.

Madame H—It is in confidence, dear pet, that I tell you this. You will swear never to speak of it?

Madame F—Confession! Oh! yes, I swear it. Come here, and let me kiss you.

Madame H—You pity me, do you not?

Madame F—I can not pity you too much, for I am absolutely in the same position.

Madame H—You, too! Good heavens! how I love you. What can one do, eh? Must one not introduce some plan of conciliation into the household, sacrifice one's belief a little to that of one's husband?

Madame F—No doubt. For instance, how would you have me go to high mass, which is celebrated at my parish church at eleven o'clock exactly? That is just our breakfast time. Can I let my husband breakfast alone? He would never hinder me from going to high mass, he has said so a thousand times, only he has always added, "When you want to go to mass during breakfast time, I only ask one thing—it is to give me notice the day before, so that I may invite some friends to keep me company."

Madame H—But only fancy, pet, our two husbands could not be more alike if they were brothers. Leon has always said, "My dear little chicken—"

Madame F—Ha! ha! ha!

Madame H—Yes, that is his name for me; you know how lively he is. He has always said to me, then, "My dear little chicken, I am not a man to do violence to your opinions, but in return give way to me as regards some of your pious practices." I only give you the mere gist of it; it was said with a thousand delicacies, which I suppress. And I have agreed by degrees, . . . so that, while only paying very little attention to the outward

observances of religion, I have remained, as I told you, a bar of iron as regards dogmas. Oh! as to that, I would not give way an inch, a hair-breadth, and Leon is the first to tell me that I am right. After all, dogma is everything; practice, well, what would you? If I could bring Leon round, it would be quite another thing. How glad I am to have spoken to you about all this.

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Madame F—Have we not been chattering? But it is half-past five, and I must go and take my cinchona bark. Thirty minutes before meals, it is a sacred duty. Will you come, pet?

Madame H—Stop a moment, I have lost my thimble again and must find it.

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

But she thinks she is affording you pleasure
Do not seek too much
First impression is based upon a number of trifles
Sometimes like to deck the future in the garments of the past
The heart requires gradual changes

MONSIEUR, MADAME AND BEBE

By Gustave Droz

BOOK 3.

CHAPTER XX

THE HOT-WATER BOTTLE

When midnight strikes, when the embers die away into ashes, when the lamp burns more feebly and your eyes close in spite of yourself, the best thing to do, dear Madame, is to go to bed.

Get up from your armchair, take off your bracelets, light your rosecolored taper, and proceed slowly, to the soft accompaniment of your trailing skirt, rustling across the carpet, to your dressing-room, that perfumed sanctuary in which your beauty, knowing itself to be alone, raises its veils, indulges in self-examination, revels in itself and reckons up its treasures as a miser does his wealth.

Before the muslin-framed mirror, which reveals all that it sees so well, you pause carelessly and with a smile give one long satisfied look, then with two fingers you withdraw the pin that kept up your hair, and its long, fair tresses unroll and fall in waves, veiling your bare shoulders. With a coquettish hand, the little finger of which is turned up, you caress, as you gather them together, the golden flood of your abundant locks, while with the other you pass through them the tortoiseshell comb that buries itself in the depths of this fair forest and bends with the effort.

Your tresses are so abundant that your little hand can scarcely grasp them. They are so long that your outstretched arm scarcely reaches their extremity. Hence it is not without difficulty that you manage to twist them up and imprison them in your embroidered night-cap.

This first duty accomplished, you turn the silver tap, and the pure and limpid water pours into a large bowl of enamelled porcelain. You throw in a few drops of that fluid which perfumes and softens the skin, and like a nymph in the depths of a quiet wood preparing for the toilet, you remove the drapery that might encumber you.

But what, Madame, you frown? Have I said too much or not enough? Is it not well known that you love cold water; and do you think it is not guessed that at the contact of the dripping sponge you quiver from head to foot?

But what matters it, your toilette for the night is completed, you are fresh, restored, and white as a nun in your embroidered dressing-gown, you dart your bare feet into satin slippers and reenter your bedroom, shivering slightly. To see you walking thus with hurried steps, wrapped tightly in your dressing-gown, and with your pretty head hidden in its nightcap, you might be taken for a little girl leaving the confessional after confessing some terrible sin.

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Gaining the bedside, Madame lays aside her slippers, and lightly and without effort, bounds into the depths of the alcove.

However, Monsieur, who was already asleep with his nose on the Moniteur, suddenly wakes up at the movement imparted to the bed.

"I thought that you were in bed already, dear," he murmurs, falling off to sleep again. "Good-night."

"If I had been in bed you would have noticed it." Madame stretches out her feet and moves them about; she seems to be in quest of something. "I am not in such a hurry to go to sleep as you are, thank goodness."

Monsieur, suddenly and evidently annoyed, says: "But what is the matter, my dear? You fidget and fidget—I want to sleep." He turns over as he speaks.

"I fidget! I am simply feeling for my hot-water bottle; you are irritating."

"Your hot-water bottle?" is Monsieur's reply, with a grunt.

"Certainly, my hot-water bottle, my feet are frozen." She goes on feeling for it. "You are really very amiable this evening; you began by dozing over the 'Revue des Deux Mondes', and I find you snoring over the 'Moniteur'. In your place I should vary my literature. I am sure you have taken my hot-water bottle."

"I have been doing wrong. I will subscribe to the 'Tintamarre' in future. Come, good-night, my dear." He turns over. "Hello, your hot-water bottle is right at the bottom of the bed; I can feel it with the tips of my toes."

"Well, push it up; do you think that I can dive down there after it?"

"Shall I ring for your maid to help you?" He makes a movement of ill-temper, pulls the clothes up to his chin, and buries his head in the pillow. "Goodnight, my dear."

Madame, somewhat vexed, says: "Good-night, goodnight."

The respiration of Monsieur grows smooth, and even his brows relax, his forehead becomes calm, he is on the point of losing all consciousness of the realities of this life.

Madame taps lightly on her husband's shoulder.

"Hum," growls Monsieur.

Madame taps again.

“Well, what is it?”

Madame, in an angelic tone of voice, “My dear, would you put out the candle?”

Monsieur, without opening his eyes, “The hot-water bottle, the candle, the candle, the hot-water bottle.”

“Good heavens! how irritable you are, Oscar. I will put it out myself. Don’t trouble yourself. You really have a very bad temper, my dear; you are angry, and if you were goaded a little, you would, in five minutes, be capable of anything.”

Monsieur, his voice smothered in the pillow, “No, not at all; I am sleepy, dear, that is all. Good-night, my dear.”

Madame, briskly, “You forget that in domestic life good feeling has for its basis reciprocal consideration.”

“I was wrong—come, good-night.” He raises himself up a little. “Would you like me to kiss you?”

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"I don't want you to, but I permit." She puts her face toward that of her husband, who kisses her on the forehead. "You are really too good, you have kissed my nightcap."

Monsieur, smiling, "Your hair smells very nice . . . You see I am so sleepy. Ah! you have it in little plaits, you are going to wave it to-morrow."

"To wave it. You were the first to find that that way of dressing it became me, besides, it is the fashion, and tomorrow is my reception day. Come, you irritable man, embrace me once for all and snore at your ease, you are dying to do so."

She holds her neck toward her husband.

Monsieur, laughing, "In the first place, I never snore. I never joke." He kisses his wife's neck, and rests his head on her shoulder.

"Well, what are you doing there?" is her remark.

"I am digesting my kiss."

Madame affects the lackadaisical, and looks sidewise at her husband with an eye half disarmed. Monsieur sniffs the loved perfume with open nostrils.

After a period of silence he whispers in his wife's ear, "I am not at all sleepy now, dear. Are your feet still cold? I will find the hot-water bottle."

"Oh, thanks, put out the light and let us go to sleep; I am quite tired out."

She turns round by resting her arm on his face.

"No, no, I won't have you go to sleep with your feet chilled; there is nothing worse. There, there is the hot-water bottle, warm your poor little feet . . . there . . . like that."

"Thanks, I am very comfortable. Good-night, dear, let us go to sleep."

"Good-night, my dear."

After a long silence Monsieur turns first on one side and then on the other, and ends by tapping lightly on his wife's shoulder.

Madame, startled, "What is the matter? Good heavens! how you startled me!"

Monsieur, smiling, "Would you be kind enough to put out the candle?"

"What! is it for that you wake me up in the middle of my sleep? I shall not be able to doze again. You are unbearable."



“You find me unbearable?” He comes quite close to his wife; “Come, let me explain my idea to you.”

Madame turns round—her eye meets the eye . . . full of softness . . of her husband. “Dear me,” she says, “you are a perfect tiger.”

Then, putting her mouth to his ear, she murmurs with a smile, “Come, explain your idea, for the sake of peace and quiet.”

Madame, after a very long silence, and half asleep, “Oscar!”

Monsieur, his eyes closed, in a faint voice, “My dear.”

“How about the candle? it is still alight.”

“Ah! the candle. I will put it out. If you were very nice you would give me a share of your hot-water bottle; one of my feet is frozen. Good-night.”

“Good-night.”

They clasp hands and fall asleep.

CHAPTER XXI

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A LONGING

Monsieur and *madame* are quietly sitting together—The clock has just struck ten—*monsieur* is in his dressing-gown and slippers, is leaning back in an armchair and reading the newspaper—*madame* is carelessly working squares of laces.

Madame—Such things have taken place, have they not, dear?

Monsieur—(without raising his eyes)—Yes, my dear.

Madame—There, well I should never have believed it. But they are monstrous, are they not?

Monsieur—(without raising his eyes)—Yes, my dear.

Madame—Well, and yet, see how strange it is, Louise acknowledged it to me last month, you know; the evening she called for me to go to the perpetual Adoration, and our hour of adoration, as it turned out, by the way, was from six to seven; impossible, too, to change our turn; none of the ladies caring to adore during dinner-time, as is natural enough. Good heavens, what a rage we were in! How good God must be to have forgiven you. Do you remember?

Monsieur—(continuing to read)—Yes, dear.

Madame—Ah! you remember that you said, ‘I don’t care a . . .’ Oh! but I won’t repeat what you said, it is too naughty. How angry you were! ‘I will go and dine at the restaurant, confound it!’ But you did not say confound, ha! ha! ha! Well, I loved you just the same at that moment; it vexed me to see you in a rage on God’s account, but for my own part I was pleased; I like to see you in a fury; your nostrils expand, and then your moustache bristles, you put me in mind of a lion, and I have always liked lions. When I was quite a child at the Zoological Gardens they could not get me away from them; I threw all my sous into their cage for them to buy gingerbread with; it was quite a passion. Well, to continue my story. (She looks toward her husband who is still reading, and after a pause,) Is it interesting—that which you are reading?

Monsieur—(like a man waking up)—What is it, my dear child? What I am reading? Oh, it would scarcely interest you. (With a grimace.) There are Latin phrases, you know, and, besides, I am hoarse. But I am listening, go, on. (He resumes his newspaper.)

Madame—Well, to return to the perpetual Adoration, Louise confided to me, under the pledge of secrecy, that she was like me.

Monsieur—Like you? What do you mean?

Madame—Like me; that is plain enough.

Monsieur—You are talking nonsense, my little angel, follies as great as your chignon. You women will end by putting pillows into your chignons.

Madame—(resting her elbows on her husband's knees)—But, after all, the instincts, the resemblances we have, must certainly be attributed to something. Can any one imagine, for instance, that God made your cousin as stupid as he is, and with a head like a pear?

Monsieur—My cousin! my cousin! Ferdinand is only a cousin by marriage. I grant, however, that he is not very bright.

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Madame—Well, I am sure that his mother must have had a longing, or something.

Monsieur—What can I do to help it, my angel?

Madame—Nothing at all; but it clearly shows that such things are not to be laughed at; and if I were to tell you that I had a longing—

Monsieur—(letting fall his newspaper)—The devil! a longing for what?

Madame—Ah! there your nostrils are dilating; you are going to resemble a lion again, and I never shall dare to tell you. It is so extraordinary, and yet my mother had exactly the same longing.

Monsieur—Come, tell it me, you see that I am patient. If it is possible to gratify it, you know that I love you, my . . . Don't kiss me on the neck; you will make me jump up to the ceiling, my darling.

Madame—Repeat those two little words. I am your darling, then?

Monsieur—Ha! ha! ha! She has little fingers which—ha! ha!—go into your neck—ha! ha!—you will make me break something, nervous as I am.

Madame—Well, break something. If one may not touch one's husband, one may as well go into a convent at once. (She puts her lips to *Monsieur's* ear and coquettishly pulls the end of his moustache.) I shall not be happy till I have what I am longing for, and then it would be so kind of you to do it.

Monsieur—Kind to do what? Come, dear, explain yourself.

Madame—You must first of all take off that great, ugly dressing-gown, pull on your boots, put on your hat and go. Oh, don't make any faces; if you grumble in the least all the merit of your devotedness will disappear . . . and go to the grocer's at the corner of the street, a very respectable shop.

Monsieur—To the grocer's at ten o'clock at night! Are you mad? I will ring for John; it is his business.

Madame (staying his hand) You indiscreet man. These are our own private affairs; we must not take any one into our confidence. I will go into your dressing-room to get your things, and you will put your boots on before the fire comfortably . . . to please me, Alfred, my love, my life. I would give my little finger to have . . .

Monsieur—To have what, hang it all, what, what, what?



Madame—(her face alight and fixing her eyes on him)—I want a sou's worth of paste. Had not you guessed it?

Monsieur—But it is madness, delirium, fol—

Madame—I said paste, dearest; only a sou's worth, wrapped in strong paper.

Monsieur—No, no. I am kind-hearted, but I should reproach myself—

Madame—(closing his mouth with her little hands)—Oh, not a word; you are going to utter something naughty. But when I tell you that I have a mad longing for it, that I love you as I have never loved you yet, that my mother had the same desire—Oh! my poor mother (she weeps in her hands), if she could only know, if she were not at the other end of France. You have never cared for my parents; I saw that very well on our wedding-day, and (she sobs) it will be the sorrow of my whole life.

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Monsieur—(freeing himself and suddenly rising)—Give me my boots.

Madame—(with effusion)—Oh, thanks, Alfred, my love, you are good, yes, you are good. Will you have your walking-stick, dear?

Monsieur—I don't care. How much do you want of that abomination—a franc's worth, thirty sous' worth, a louis' worth?

Madame—You know very well that I would not make an abuse of it—only a sou's worth. I have some sous for mass; here, take one. Adieu, Alfred; be quick; be quick!

(Exit *monsieur*.)

Left alone, Madame wafts a kiss in her most tender fashion toward the door Monsieur has just closed behind him, then goes toward the glass and smiles at herself with pleasure. Then she lights the wax candle in a little candlestick, and quietly makes her way to the kitchen, noiselessly opens a press, takes out three little dessert plates, bordered with gold and ornamented with her initials, next takes from a box lined with white leather, two silver spoons, and, somewhat embarrassed by all this luggage, returns to her bedroom.

Then she pokes the fire, draws a little buhl table close up to the hearth, spreads a white cloth, sets out the plates, puts the spoons by them, and enchanted, impatient, with flushed complexion, leans back in an armchair. Her little foot rapidly taps the floor, she smiles, pouts—she is waiting.

At last, after an interval of some minutes, the outer door is heard to close, rapid steps cross the drawingroom, Madame claps her hands and Monsieur comes in. He does not look very pleased, as he advances holding awkwardly in his left hand a flattened parcel, the contents of which may be guessed.

Madame—(touching a gold-bordered plate and holding it out to her husband)—Relieve yourself of it, dear. Could you not have been quicker?

Monsieur—Quicker?

Madame—Oh! I am not angry with you, that is not meant for a reproach, you are an angel; but it seems to me a century since you started.

Monsieur—The man was just going to shut his shop up. My gloves are covered with it . . . it's sticky . . . it's horrid, pah! the abomination! At last I shall have peace and quietness.



Madame—Oh! no harsh words, they hurt me so. But look at this pretty little table, do you remember how we supped by the fireside? Ah! you have forgotten it, a man's heart has no memory.

Monsieur—Are you so mad as to imagine that I am going to touch it? Oh! indeed! that is carrying—

Madame—(sadly)—See what a state you get in over a little favor I ask of you. If in order to please me you were to overcome a slight repugnance, if you were just to touch this nice, white jelly with your lips, where would be the harm?

Monsieur—The harm! the harm! it would be ridiculous. Never.

Madame—That is the reason? “It would be absurd.” It is not from disgust, for there is nothing disgusting there, it is flour and water, nothing more. It is not then from a dislike, but out of pride that you refuse?

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Monsieur—(shrugging his shoulders)—What you say is childish, puerile, silly. I do not care to answer it.

Madame—And what you say is neither generous nor worthy of you, since you abuse your superiority. You see me at your feet pleading for an insignificant thing, puerile, childish, foolish, perhaps, but one which would give me pleasure, and you think it heroic not to yield. Do you want me to speak out, well? then, you men are unfeeling.

Monsieur—Never.

Madame—Why, you admitted it to me yourself one night, on the Pont des Arts, as we were walking home from the theatre.

Monsieur—After all, there is no great harm in that.

Madame—(sadly)—I am not angry with you, this sternness is part of your nature, you are a rod of iron.

Monsieur—I have some energy when it is needed, I grant you, but I have not the absurd pride you imagine, and there (he dips his finger in the paste and carries it to his lips), is the proof, you spoilt child. Are you satisfied? It has no taste, it is insipid.

Madame—You were pretending.

Monsieur—I swear to you . . .

Madame (taking a little soon, filling it with her precious paste and holding it to her husband's lips)—I want to see the face you will make, love.

Monsieur—(Puts out his lips, buries his two front teeth, with marked disgust, in the paste, makes a horrible face and spits into the fireplace)—Eugh.

Madame—(still holding the spoon and with much interest) Well?

Monsieur—Well! it is awful! oh! awful! taste it.

Madame—(dreamily stirring the paste with the spoon, her little finger in the air)—I should never have believed that it was so nasty.

Monsieur—You will soon see for yourself, taste it, taste it.

Madame—I am in no hurry, I have plenty of time.

Monsieur—To see what it is like. Taste a little, come.

Madame—(pushing away the plate with a look of horror)—Oh! how you worry me. Be quiet, do; for a trifle I could hate you. It is disgusting, this paste of yours!

CHAPTER XXII

FAMILY LIFE

It was the evening of the 15th of February. It was dreadfully cold. The snow drove against the windows and the wind whistled furiously under the doors. My two aunts, seated at a table in one corner of the drawing-room, gave vent from time to time to deep sighs, and, wriggling in their armchairs, kept casting uneasy glances toward the bedroom door. One of them had taken from a little leather bag placed on the table her blessed rosary and was repeating her prayers, while her sister was reading a volume of Voltaire's correspondence which she held at a distance from her eyes, her lips moving as she perused it.

For my own part, I was striding up and down the room, gnawing my moustache, a bad habit I have never been able to get rid of, and halting from time to time in front of Dr. C., an old friend of mine, who was quietly reading the paper in the most comfortable of the armchairs. I dared not disturb him, so absorbed did he seem in what he was reading, but in my heart I was furious to see him so quiet when I myself was so agitated.

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Suddenly he tossed the paper on to the couch and, passing his hand across his bald and shining head, said:

“Ah! if I were a minister, it would not take long, no, it would not be very long You have read that article on Algerian cotton. One of two things, either irrigation But you are not listening to me, and yet it is a more serious matter than you think.”

He rose, and with his hands in his pocket, walked across the room humming an old medical student’s song. I followed him closely.

“Jacques,” said I, as he turned round, “tell me frankly, are you satisfied?”

“Yes, yes, I am satisfied . . . observe my untroubled look,” and he broke into his hearty and somewhat noisy laugh.

“You are not hiding anything from me, my dear fellow?”

“What a donkey you are, old fellow. I tell you that everything is going on well.”

And he resumed his song, jingling the money in his pockets.

“All is going on well, but it will take some time,” he went on. “Let me have one of your dressing-gowns. I shall be more comfortable for the night, and these ladies will excuse me, will they not?”

“Excuse you, I should think so, you, the doctor, and my friend!” I felt devotedly attached to him that evening.

“Well, then, if they will excuse me, you can very well let me have a pair of slippers.”

At this moment a cry came from the next room and we distinctly heard these words in a stifled voice:

“Doctor . . . oh! mon Dieu! . . . doctor!”

“It is frightful,” murmured my aunts.

“My dear friend,” I exclaimed, seizing the doctor’s arm, “you are quite sure you are not concealing anything from me?”

“If you have a very loose pair they will suit me best; I have not the foot of a young girl I am not concealing anything, I am not concealing anything What do you think I should hide from you? It is all going on very well, only as I said it will take time—By the way, tell Joseph to get me one of your smokingcaps; once in dressing-gown and slippers a smokingcap is not out of the way, and I am getting bald, my dear Captain.

How infernally cold it is here! These windows face the north, and there are no sand-bags. Mademoiselle de V.," he added, turning to my aunt, "you will catch cold."

Then as other sounds were heard, he said: "Let us go and see the little lady."

"Come here," said my wife, who had caught sight of me, in a low voice, "come here and shake hands with me." Then she drew me toward her and whispered in my ear: "You will be pleased to kiss the little darling, won't you?" Her voice was so faint and so tender as she said this, and she added: "Do not take your hand away, it gives me courage."

I remained beside her, therefore, while the doctor, who had put on my dressing-gown, vainly strove to button it.

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From time to time my poor little wife squeezed my hand violently, closing her eyes, but not uttering a cry. The fire sparkled on the hearth. The pendulum of the clock went on with its monotonous ticking, but it seemed to me that all this calm was only apparent, that everything about me must be in a state of expectation like myself and sharing my emotion. In the bedroom beyond, the door of which was ajar, I could see the end of the cradle and the shadow of the nurse who was dozing while she waited.

What I felt was something strange. I felt a new sentiment springing up in my heart, I seemed to have some foreign body within my breast, and this sweet sensation was so new to me that I was, as it were, alarmed at it. I felt the little creature, who was there without yet being there, clinging to me; his whole life unrolled itself before me. I saw him at the same time a child and a grown-up man; it seemed to me that my own life was about to be renewed in his and I felt from time to time an irresistible need of giving him something of myself.

Toward half-past eleven, the doctor, like a captain consulting his compass, pulled out his watch, muttered something and drew near the bed.

"Come, my dear lady," said he to my wife, "courage, we are all round you and all is going well; within five minutes you will hear him cry out."

My mother-in-law, almost beside herself, was biting her lips and each pang of the sufferer was reflected upon her face. Her cap had got disarranged in such a singular fashion that, under any other circumstances, I should have burst out laughing. At that moment I heard the drawing-room door open and saw the heads of my aunts, one above the other, and behind them that of my father, who was twisting his heavy white moustache with a grimace that was customary to him.

"Shut the door," cried the doctor, angrily, "don't bother me."

And with the greatest coolness in the world he turned to my mother-in-law and added, "I ask a thousand pardons."

But just then there was something else to think of than my old friend's bluntness.

"Is everything ready to receive him?" he continued, growling.

"Yes, my dear doctor," replied my mother-in-law.

At length, the doctor lifted into the air a little object which almost immediately uttered a cry as piercing as a needle. I shall never forget the impression produced on me by this poor little thing, making its appearance thus, all of a sudden, in the middle of the family. We had thought and dreamed of it; I had seen him in my mind's eye, my darling child, playing with a hoop, pulling my moustache, trying to walk, or gorging himself with milk in his nurse's arms like a gluttonous little kitten; but I had never pictured him to myself,

inanimate, almost lifeless, quite tiny, wrinkled, hairless, grinning, and yet, charming, adorable, and be loved in spite of all-poor, ugly, little thing. It was a strange impression, and so singular that it is impossible to understand it, without having experienced it.

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"What luck you have!" said the doctor, holding the child toward me; "it is a boy."

"A boy!"

"And a fine one."

"Really, a boy!"

That was a matter of indifference to me now. What was causing me indescribable emotion was the living proof of paternity, this little being who was my own. I felt stupefied in presence of the great mystery of childbirth. My wife was there, fainting, overcame, and the little living creature, my own flesh, my own blood, was squalling and gesticulating in the hands of Jacques. I was overwhelmed, like a workman who had unconsciously produced a masterpiece. I felt myself quite small in presence of this quivering piece of my own handiwork, and, frankly, a little bit ashamed of having made it so well almost without troubling about it. I can not undertake to explain all this, I merely relate my impressions.

My mother-in-law held out her apron and the doctor placed the child on his grandmother's knees, saying: "Come, little savage, try not to be any worse than your rascal of a father. Now for five minutes of emotion. Come, Captain, embrace me."

We did so heartily. The doctor's little black eyes twinkled more brightly than usual; I saw very well that he was moved.

"Did it make you feel queer, Captain? I mean the cry? Ah! I know it, it is like a needle through the heart . . . Where is the nurse? Ah! here she is. No matter, he is a fine boy, your little lancer. Open the door for the prisoners in the drawing-room."

I opened the door. Every one was listening on the other side of it. My father, my two aunts, still holding in their hands, one her rosary and the other her Voltaire, my own nurse, poor old woman, who had come in a cab.

"Well," they exclaimed anxiously, "well?"

"It is all over, it is a boy; go in, he is there."

You can not imagine how happy I was to see on all their faces the reflection of my own emotion. They embraced me and shook hands with me, and I responded to all these marks of affection without exactly knowing where they came from.

"Damn it all!" muttered my father, in my ear, holding me in his arms, with his stick still in his hand and his hat on his head, "Damn it all!"

But he could not finish, however brave he might wish to appear; a big tear was glittering at the tip of his nose. He muttered “Hum!” under his moustache and finally burst into tears on my shoulder, saying: “I can not help it.”

And I did likewise—I could not help it either.

However, everybody was flocking round the grandmamma, who lifted up a corner of her apron and said:

“How pretty he is, the darling, how pretty! Nurse, warm the linen, give me the caps.”

“Smile at your aunty,” said my aunt, jangling her rosary above the baby’s head, “smile at aunty.”

“Ask him at the same time to recite a fable,” said the doctor.

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Meanwhile my wife was coming to herself; she half opened her eyes and seemed to be looking for something.

"Where is he?" she murmured in a faint voice.

They showed her her mother's apron.

"A boy, is it not?"

Taking my hand, she drew me down toward her and said in a whisper, "Are you satisfied with me? I did my best, dear."

"Come, no emotion," exclaimed the doctor, "you shall kiss each other tomorrow. Colonel," he said to my father, who still retained his hat and stick, "keep them from kissing. No emotion, and every one outside. I am going to dress the little lancer. Give me the little man, grandmamma. Come here, little savage. You shall see whether I don't know how to fasten pins in."

He took the baby in his two large hands and sat down on a stool before the fire.

I watched my boy whom Jacques was turning about like a doll, but with great skill. He examined him all over, touching and feeling him, and at each test said with a smile:

"He is a fine one, he is a fine one."

Then he rolled him up in his clothes, put a triple cap on his little bald head, tied a folded ribbon under his chin to prevent his head falling backward, and then, satisfied with his work, said:

"You saw how I did it, nurse? Well, you must dress this lancer every morning in the same way. Nothing but a little sugar and water till to-morrow. The mother has no fever. Come, all is going on well.

"Lucky Captain! I am so hungry. Do you know that it is one in the morning? You haven't got cold partridge or a bit of pie that you don't know what to do with, have you? It would suit me down to the ground, with a bottle of something."

We went both into the dining-room and laid the cloth without any more ceremony.

I never in my life ate and drank so much as on that occasion.

"Come, get off to bed," said the doctor, putting on his coat. "To-morrow morning you shall have the wet-nurse. No, by the way, I'll call for you, and we will go and choose her together; it is curious. Be under arms at half-past eight."

CHAPTER XXIII

NEW YEAR'S DAY

It is barely seven o'clock. A pale ray of daylight is stealing through the double curtains, and already some one is tapping at the door. I can hear in the next room from the stifled laughter and the silvery tones of Baby, who is quivering with impatience, and asking leave to come in.

"Papa," he cries, "it is Baby, it is Baby come for the New Year."

"Come in, my darling; come quick, and kiss us."

The door opens and my boy, his eyes aglow, and his arms raised, rushes toward the bed. His curls, escaping from the nightcap covering his head, float on his forehead. His long, loose night-shirt, catching his little feet, increases his impatience, and causes him to stumble at every step.

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At length he crosses the room, and, holding out his two hands to mine: "Baby wishes you a Happy New Year," he says, in an earnest voice.

"Poor little love, with his bare feet! Come, darling, and warm yourself under the counterpane."

I lift him toward me, but at this moment my wife, who is asleep, suddenly wakes.

"Who is there?" she exclaims, feeling for the bell. "Thieves!"

"It is we two, dear."

"Who? Good heavens! how you frightened me! I was dreaming the house was on fire, and that I heard your voice amid the raging flames. You were very indiscreet in shouting like that!"

"Shouting! but you forget, mamma, that it is New Year's Day, the day of smiles and kisses? Baby was waiting for you to wake up, as well as myself."

However, I wrap the little fellow up in the eiderdown quilt and warm his cold feet in my hands.

"Mamma, it is New Year's Day," he exclaims. With his arms he draws our two heads together, puts forward his own and kisses us at haphazard with his moist lips. I feel his dimpled fists digging into my neck, his little fingers entangled in my beard.

My moustache tickles the tip of his nose, and he bursts into a fit of joyous laughter as he throws his head back.

His mother, who has recovered from her fright, takes him in her arms and rings the bell.

"The year is beginning well, dear," she says, "but we must have a little daylight."

"Mamma, naughty children don't have any new toys on New Year's Day, do they?"

And as he says this the sly fellow eyes a pile of parcels and packages heaped up in one corner, visible despite the semidarkness.

Soon the curtains are drawn aside, and the shutters opened; daylight floods the room; the fire crackles merrily on the hearth, and two large parcels, carefully tied up, are placed on the bed. One is for my wife, and the other for my boy.

"What is it? What is it?" I have multiplied the knots and tripled the wrappings, and I gleefully follow their impatient fingers entangled among the strings.

My wife gets impatient, smiles, pouts, kisses me, and asks for the scissors.

Baby on his side tugs with all his might, biting his lips as he does so, and ends by asking my help. His look strives to penetrate the wrappers. All the signs of desire and expectation are stamped on his face. His hand, hidden under the coverlet, causes the silk to rustle with his convulsive movements, and his lips quiver as at the approach of some dainty.

At length the last paper falls aside. The lid is lifted, and joy breaks forth.

“A fur tippet!”

“A Noah’s ark!”

“To match my muff, dear, kind husband.”

“With a Noah on wheels, dear papa. I do love you so.”

They throw themselves on my neck, four arms are clasped round me at once. Emotion gets the better of me, and a tear steals into my eye. There are two in those of my wife, and Baby, losing his head, sobs as he kisses my hand.

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It is absurd.

Absurd, I don't know; but delightful, I can answer for it.

Does not grief, after all, call forth enough tears for us to forgive joy the solitary one she perchance causes us to shed!

Life is not so sweet for us to risk ourselves in it singlehanded, and when the heart is empty the way seems very long.

It is so pleasant to feel one's self loved, to hear beside one the cadenced steps of one's fellow-travellers, and to say, "They are here, our three hearts beat in unison." So pleasant once a year, when the great clock strikes the first of January, to sit down beside the path, with hands locked together, and eyes fixed on the unknown dusty road losing itself in the horizon, and to say, while embracing one another, "We still love one another, my dear children; you rely on me, and I rely on you. Let us have confidence, and walk steadfastly."

This is how I explain that one may weep a little while examining a new fur tippet and opening a Noah's ark.

But breakfast time draws near. I have cut myself twice while shaving; I have stepped on my son's wild beasts in turning round, and I have the prospect of a dozen duty calls, as my wife terms them, before me; yet I am delighted.

We sit down to the breakfast table, which has a more than usually festive aspect. A faint aroma of truffles perfumes the air, every one is smiling, and through the glass I see, startling sight! the doorkeeper, with his own hands, wiping the handrail of the staircase. It is a glorious day.

Baby has ranged his elephants, lions, and giraffes round his plate, and his mother, under pretext of a draught, breakfasts in her tippet.

"Have you ordered the carriage, dear, for our visits?" I ask.

"That cushion for Aunt Ursula will take up such a deal of room. It might be put beside the coachman."

"Poor aunt."

"Papa, don't let us go to Aunt Ursula," said Baby; "she pricks so when she kisses you."

"Naughty boy Think of all we have to get into the carriage. Leon's rocking-horse, Louise's muff, your father's slippers, Ernestine's quilt, the bonbons, the work-box. I declare, aunt's cushion must go under the coachman's feet."

“Papa, why doesn’t the giraffe eat cutlets?”

“I really don’t know, dear.”

“Neither do I, papa.”

An hour later we are ascending the staircase leading to Aunt Ursula’s. My wife counts the steps as she pulls herself up by the hand-rail, and I carry the famous cushion, the bonbons, and my son, who has insisted on bringing his giraffe with him.

Aunt Ursula, who produces the same effect on him as the sight of a rod would, is waiting us in her icy little drawing-room. Four square armchairs, hidden beneath yellow covers, stand vacant behind four little mats. A clock in the shape of a pyramid, surmounted on a sphere, ticks under a glass case.

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A portrait on the wall, covered with fly-spots, shows a nymph with a lyre, standing beside a waterfall. This nymph was Aunt Ursula. How she has altered!

"My dear aunt, we have come to wish you a Happy New Year."

"To express our hopes that—"

"Thank you, nephew, thank you, niece," and she points to two chairs. "I am sensible of this step on your part; it proves to me that you have not altogether forgotten the duties imposed upon you by family ties."

"You are reckoning, my dear aunt, without the affection we feel for you, and which of itself is enough . . . Baby, go and kiss your aunt."

Baby whispers in my ear, "But, papa, I tell you she does prick."

I place the bonbons on a side-table.

"You can, nephew, dispense with offering me that little gift; you know that sweetmeats disagree with me, and, if I were not aware of your indifference as to the state of my health, I should see in your offering a veiled sarcasm. But let that pass. Does your father still bear up against his infirmities courageously?"

"Thank you, yes."

"I thought to please you, dear aunt," observes my wife, "by embroidering for you this cushion, which I beg you to accept."

"I thank you, child, but I can still hold myself sufficiently upright, thank God, not to have any need of a cushion. The embroidery is charming, it is an Oriental design. You might have made a better choice, knowing that I like things much more simple. It is charming, however, although this red next to the green here sets one's teeth on edge. Taste in colors is, however, not given to every one. I have, in return, to offer you my photograph, which that dear Abbe Miron insisted on my having taken."

"How kind you are, and how like you it is! Do you recognize your aunt, Baby?"

"Do not think yourself obliged to speak contrary to your opinion. This photograph does not in any way resemble me, my eyes are much brighter. I have also a packet of jujubes for your child. He seems to have grown."

"Baby, go and kiss your aunt."

"And then we shall go, mamma?"

“You are very rude, my dear.”

“Let him speak out; at any rate, he is frank. But I see that your husband is getting impatient, you have other . . . errands to fulfil; I will not keep you. Besides, I am going to church to pray for those who do not pray for themselves.”

From twelve duty calls, subtract one duty call, and eleven remain. Hum! “Coachman, Rue St. Louis au Marais.”

“Papa, has Aunt Ursula needles in her chin?”

Let us pass over the eleven duty calls, they are no more agreeable to write of than to make.

Toward seven o’clock, heaven be praised, the horses stop before my father’s, where dinner awaits us. Baby claps his hands, and smiles at old Jeannette, who, at the sound of the wheels, has rushed to the door. “Here they are,” she exclaims, and she carries off Baby to the kitchen, where my mother, with her sleeves turned up, is giving the finishing touch to her traditional plum cake.

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My father, on his way to the cellar, lantern in hand, and escorted by his old servant, Jean, who is carrying the basket, halts. "Why, children, how late you are! Come to my arms, my dears; this is the day on which one kisses in good earnest. Jean, hold my lantern a minute." And as my old father clasps me to his breast, his hand seeks out mine and grasps it, with a long clasp. Baby, who glides in between our legs, pulls our coat-tails and holds up his little mouth for a kiss too.

"But I am keeping you here in the anteroom and you are frozen; go into the drawing-room, there are a good fire and good friends there."

They have heard us, the door opens, and a number of arms are held out to us. Amid handshakings, embracings, good wishes, and kisses, boxes are opened, bonbons are showered forth, parcels are undone, mirth becomes deafening, and good humor tumultuous. Baby standing amid his presents resembles a drunken man surrounded by a treasure, and from time to time gives a cry of joy on discovering some fresh toy.

"The little man's fable," exclaims my father, swinging his lantern which he has taken again from Jean.

A deep silence ensues, and the poor child, whose debut in the elocutionary art it is, suddenly loses countenance. He casts down his eyes, blushes and takes refuge in the arms of his mother, who, stooping down, whispers, "Come, darling, 'A lamb was quenching'; you know the wolf and the lamb."

"Yes, mamma, I know the little lamb that wanted to drink." And in a contrite voice, his head bent down on his breast, he repeats with a deep sigh, "'A little lamb was quenching his thirst in a clear stream.'"

We all, with ears on the alert and a smile on our lips, follow his delightful little jargon.

Uncle Bertrand, who is rather deaf, has made an ear trumpet of his hand and drawn his chair up. "Ah! I can follow it," he says. "It is the fox and the grapes." And as there is a murmur of "Hush," at this interruption, he adds: "Yes, yes, he recites with intelligence, great intelligence."

Success restores confidence to my darling, who finishes his fable with a burst of laughter. Joy is communicative, and we take our places at table amid the liveliest mirth.

"By the way," says my father, "where the deuce is my lantern. I have forgotten all about the cellar. Jean, take your basket and let us go and rummage behind the fagots."

The soup is smoking, and my mother, after having glanced smilingly round the table, plunges her ladle into the tureen. Give me the family dinner table at which those we love are seated, at which we may risk resting our elbows at dessert, and at which at thirty we once more taste the wine offered at our baptism.

CHAPTER XXIV

Letters of A young mother to her friend.

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The little caps are the ones I want, Marie. Be good enough to send me the pattern of the braces, those of your own invention, you know. Thanks for your coverlet, it is soft, flexible, warm, and charming, and Baby, amid its white wool, looks like a rosebud hidden in the snow. I am becoming poetical, am I not? But what would you have? My poor heart is overflowing with joy. My son, do you understand that, dear, my own son? When I heard the sharp cry of the little being whom my mother showed me lying in her apron, it seemed to me that a burning thrill of love shot through my veins. My old doctor's bald head was close to me, I caught hold of it and kissed him thrice.

"Calm yourself, my dear child," said he.

"Doctor, be quiet, or I will kiss you again. Give me my baby, my love. Are you quite sure it is a boy?"

And in the adjoining drawing-room, where the whole family were waiting, I could hear amid the sound of kisses, the delightful words, "It is a boy, a fine boy."

My poor husband, who for twelve hours had not left me, overcome with fatigue and emotion, was crying and laughing in one corner of the room.

"Come, nurse, swaddle him, quick now. No pins, confound it all, strings, I will have strings. What? Give me the child, you don't understand anything about it."

And the good doctor in the twinkling of an eye had dressed my child.

"He looks a Colonel, your boy. Put him into the cradle with . . . now be calm, my dear patient . . . with a hot-water bottle to his feet. Not too much fire, especially in the Colonel's room. Now, no more noise, repose, and every one out of the way."

And as through the opening of the door which was just ajar, Aunt Ursula whispered, "Doctor, let me come in; just to press her hand, doctor."

"Confound it! every one must be off; silence and quiet are absolutely necessary." They all left.

"Octave," continued the doctor, "come and kiss your wife now, and make an end of it. Good little woman, she has been very brave . . . Octave, come and kiss your wife, and be quick about it if you don't want me to kiss her myself. I will do what I say," he added, threatening to make good his words.

Octave, buried in his child's cradle, did not hear.

"Good, now he is going to suffocate my Colonel for me."

My husband came at length. He held out his hand which was quivering with emotion, and I grasped it with all my might. If my heart at that moment did not break from excess of feeling, it was because God no doubt knew that I should still have need of it.

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You know, dear Marie, that before a child comes we love each other as husband and wife, but we love each other on our own account, while afterward we love each other on his, the dear love, who with his tiny hand has rivetted the chain forever. God, therefore, allows the heart to grow and swell. Mine was full; nevertheless, my baby came and took his place in it. Yet nothing overflowed, and I still feel that there is room for mother and yourself. You told me, and truly, that this would be a new life, a life of deep love and delightful devotion. All my past existence seems trivial and colorless to me, and I perceive that I am beginning to live. I am as proud as a soldier who has been in battle. Wife and mother, those words are our epaulettes. Grandmother is the field-marshal's baton.

How sweet I shall render the existence of my two loved ones!

How I shall cherish them! I am wild, I weep, I should like to kiss you. I am afraid I am too happy.

My husband is really good. He holds the child with such pleasing awkwardness, it costs him such efforts to lift this slight burden. When he brings it to me, wrapped in blankets, he walks with slow and careful steps. One would think that the ground was going to crumble away beneath his feet. Then he places the little treasure in my bed, quite close to me, on a large pillow. We deck Baby; we settle him comfortably, and if after many attempts we get him to smile, it is an endless joy. Often my husband and I remain in the presence of this tiny creature, our heads resting on our hands. We silently follow the hesitating and charming movements of his little rosy-nailed hand on the silk, and we find in this so deep a charm that it needs a considerable counter-attraction to tear us away.

We have most amusing discussions on the shape of his forehead and the color of his eyes, which always end in grand projects for his future, very silly, no doubt, but so fascinating.

Octave wants him to follow a diplomatic career. He says that he has the eye of a statesman and that his gestures, though few, are full of meaning. Poor, dear little ambassador, with only three hairs on your head! But what dear hairs they are, those threads of gold curling at the back of his neck, just above the rosy fold where the skin is so fine and so fresh that kisses nestle there of themselves.

The whole of this little body has a perfume which intoxicates me and makes my heart leap. What, dear friend, are the invisible ties which bind us to our children? Is it an atom of our own soul, a part of our own life, which animates and vivifies them? There must be something of the kind, for I can read amid the mists of his little mind. I divine his wishes, I know when he is cold, I can tell when he is hungry.

Do you know the most delightful moment? It is when after having taken his evening meal and gorged himself with milk like a gluttonous little kitten, he falls asleep with his

rosy cheek resting on my arm. His limbs gently relax, his head sinks down on my breast, his eyes close, and his half-opened mouth continues to repeat the action of suckling.

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His warm, moist breath brushes the hand that is supporting him. Then I wrap him up snugly in my turned-up skirt, hide his little feet under his clothes and watch my darling. I have him there, all to myself, on my knees. There is not a quiver of his being that escapes me or that does not vibrate in myself. I feel at the bottom of my heart a mirror that reflects them all. He is still part of me. Is it not my milk that nourishes him, my voice that hushes him off to sleep, my hand that dresses and caresses, encourages and supports him? The feeling that I am all in all for him further adds a delicious charm of protection to the delight of having brought him into the world.

When I think that there are women who pass by such joys without turning their heads. The fools!

Yes, the present is delightful and I am drunk with happiness. There is also the future, far away in the clouds. I often think of it, and I do not know why I shudder at the approach of a storm.

Madness! I shall love him so discreetly, I shall render the weight of my affection so light for him, that why should he wish to separate from me? Shall I not in time become his friend? Shall I not when a black down shadows those rosy little lips, when the bird, feeling its wings grown, seeks to leave the nest, shall I not be able to bring him back by invisible ties to the arms in which he now is sleeping? Perhaps at that wretched moment they call a man's youth you will forget me, my little darling! Other hands than mine perhaps will brush the hair away from your forehead at twenty. Alas! other lips, pressed burningly where mine are now pressed, will wipe out with a kiss twenty years of caresses. Yes, but when you return from this intoxicating and fatiguing journey, tired and exhausted, you will soon take refuge in the arms that once nursed you, you will rest your poor, aching head where it rests now, you will ask me to wipe away your tears and to make you forget the bruises received on the way, and I shall give you, weeping for joy, the kiss which at once consoles and fills with hope.

But I see that I am writing a whole volume, dear Marie. I will not re-read it or I should never dare to send it to you. What would you have? I am losing my head a little. I am not yet accustomed to all this happiness.

Yours affectionately.

CHAPTER XXV

FOUR YEARS LATER

Yes, my dear, he is a man and a man for good and all. He has come back from the country half as big again and as bold as a lion. He climbs on to the chairs, stops the clocks and sticks his hands in his pockets like a grown-up person.



When I see in the morning in the anteroom my baby's little shoes standing proudly beside the paternal boots, I experience, despite myself, a return toward that past which is yet so near. Yesterday swaddling clothes, today boots, tomorrow spurs. Ah! how the happy days fly by. Already four years old. I can scarcely carry him, even supposing he allowed me to, for his manly dignity is ticklish. He passes half his life armed for war, his pistols, his guns, his whips and his swords are all over the place. There is a healthy frankness about all his doings that charms me.

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Do you imagine from this that my demon no longer has any good in him? At times he is an angel and freely returns the caresses I bestow upon him. In the evening after dinner he gets down into my armchair, takes my head in his hands and arranges my hair in his own way. His fresh little mouth travels all over my face. He imprints big sounding kisses on the back of my neck, which makes me shudder all over. We have endless talks together. "Why's" come in showers, and all these "why's" require real answers; for the intelligence of children is above all things logical. I will only give one of his sayings as a proof.

His grandmother is rather unwell, and every night he tacks on to his prayer these simple words, "Please God make Granny well, because I love her so." But for greater certainty he has added on his own account, "You know, God, Granny who lives in the Rue Saint-Louis, on the first floor." He says all this with an expression of simple confidence and such comic seriousness, the little love. You understand, it is to spare God the trouble of looking for the address.

I leave you; I hear him cough. I do not know whether he has caught cold, but I think he has been looking rather depressed since the morning. Do not laugh at me, I am not otherwise uneasy.

Yours most affectionately.

Yesterday there was a consultation. On leaving the house my old doctor's eyes were moist; he strove to hide it, but I saw a tear. My child must be very ill then? The thought is dreadful, dear. They seek to reassure me, but I tremble.

The night has not brought any improvement. Still this fever. If you could see the state of the pretty little body we used to admire so. I will not think of what God may have in store for me. Ice has been ordered to be put to his head. His hair had to be cut off. Poor fair little curls that used to float in the wind as he ran after his hoop. It is terrible. I have dreadful forebodings.

My child, my poor child! He is so weak that not a word comes now from his pale parched lips. His large eyes that still shine in the depths of their sockets, smile at me from time to time, but this smile is so gentle, so faint, that it resembles a farewell. A farewell! But what would become of me?

This morning, thinking he was asleep, I could not restrain a sob. His lips opened, and he said, but in a whisper so low that I had to put my ear close down to catch it: "You do love me then, mamma?"

Do I love him? I should die.

Nice.



They have brought me here and I feel no better for it. Every day my weakness increases. I still spit blood. Besides, what do they seek to cure me of?
Yours as ever.

If I should never return to Paris, you will find in my wardrobe his last toys; the traces of his little fingers are still visible on them. To the left is the branch of the blessed box that used to hang at his bedside. Let your hands alone touch all this. Burn these dear relics, this poor evidence of shattered happiness. I can still see . . . Sobs are choking me.

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Farewell, dear friend. What would you? I built too high on too unstable a soil. I loved one object too well.

Yours from my heart.

CHAPTER XXVI

OLD RECOLLECTIONS

Cover yourselves with fine green leaves, tall trees casting your peaceful shade. Steal through the branches, bright sunlight, and you, studious promenaders, contemplative idlers, mammas in bright toilettes, gossiping nurses, noisy children, and hungry babies, take possession of your kingdom; these long walks belong to you.

It is Sunday. Joy and festivity. The gaufre seller decks his shop and lights his stove. The white cloth is spread on the table and piles of golden cakes attract the customer.

The woman who lets out chairs has put on her apron with its big pockets for sous. The park keeper, my dear little children, has curled his moustache, polished up his harmless sword and put on his best uniform. See how bright and attractive the marionette theatre looks in the sunshine, under its striped covering.

Sunday requires all this in its honor.

Unhappy are those to whom the tall trees of Luxembourg gardens do not recall one of those recollections which cling to the heart like its first perfume to a vase.

I was a General, under those trees, a General with a plume like a mourning coach-horse, and armed to the teeth. I held command from the hut of the newspaper vendor to the kiosk of the gaufre seller. No false modesty, my authority extended to the basin of the fountain, although the great white swans rather alarmed me. Ambushes behind the tree trunks, advanced posts behind the nursemaids, surprises, fights with cold steel; attacks by skirmishers, dust, encounters, carnage and no bloodshed. After which our mammas wiped our foreheads, rearranged our dishevelled hair, and tore us away from the battle, of which we dreamed all night.

Now, as I pass through the garden with its army of children and nurses, leaning on my stick with halting step, how I regret my General's cocked hat, my paper plume, my wooden sword and my pistol. My pistol that would snap caps and was the cause of my rapid promotion.

Disport yourselves, little folks; gossip, plump nurses, as you scold your soldiers. Embroider peaceably, young mothers, making from time to time a little game of your neighbors among yourselves; and you, reflective idlers, look at that charming picture-babies making a garden.



Playing in the sand, a game as old as the world and always amusing. Hillocks built up in a line with little bits of wood stuck into them, represent gardens in the walks of which baby gravely places his little uncertain feet. What would he not give, dear little man, to be able to complete his work by creating a pond in his park, a pond, a gutter, three drops of water?

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Further on the sand is damper, and in the mountain the little fingers pierce a tunnel. A gigantic work which the boot of a passer-by will soon destroy. What passer-by respects a baby's mountain? Hence the young rascal avenges himself. See that gentleman in the brown frockcoat, who is reading the 'Revue des Deux Mondes' on the bench; our workers have piled up hillocks of sand and dust around him, the skirts of his coat have already lost their color.

But let this equipage noisily dashing along go by. Four horses, two bits of string, and a fifth horse who is the driver. That is all, and yet one fancies one's self in a postchaise. How many places has one not visited by nightfall?

There are drivers who prefer to be horses, there are horses who would rather be drivers; first symptoms of ambition.

And the solitary baby who slowly draws his omnibus round the gaufre seller, eyeing his shop! An indefatigable consumer, but a poor paymaster.

Do you see down there under the plane-trees that group of nurses, a herd of Burgundian milch kine, and at their feet, rolling on a carpet, all those little rosy cheeked philosophers who only ask God for a little sunshine, pure milk, and quiet, in order to be happy. Frequently an accident disturbs the delightful calm. The Burgundian who mistrusted matters darts forward. It is too late.

"The course of a river is not to be checked," says Giboyer.

Sometimes the disaster is still more serious, and one repairs it as one can; but the philosopher who loves these disasters is indignant and squalls, swearing to himself to begin again.

Those little folk are delightful; we love children, but this affection for the species in general becomes yet more sweet when it is no longer a question of a baby, but of one's own baby.

Bachelors must not read what follows; I wish to speak to the family circle. Between those of a trade there is a better understanding.

I am a father, my dear madame, and have been of course the rejoicing papa of a matchless child. From beneath his cap there escaped a fair and curly tress that was our delight, and when I touched his white neck with my finger he broke into a laugh and showed me his little white pearls, as he clasped my head in his two chubby arms.

His first tooth was an event. We went into the light the better to see. The grandparents looked through their glasses at the little white spot, and I, with outstretched neck, demonstrated, explained and proved. And all at once I ran off to the cellar to seek out in the right corner a bottle of the best.



My son's first tooth. We spoke of his career during dinner, and at dessert grand-mamma gave us a song.

After this tooth came others, and with them tears and pain, but then when they were all there how proudly he bit into his slice of bread, how vigorously he attacked his chop in order to eat "like papa."

I had been forbidden to undress him, because it had been found that I entangled the knots instead of undoing them.

All this was charming, but when it was necessary to act rigorously and check the romping that was going too far, he would slowly drop his eyelids, while with dilated nostrils and trembling lips he tried to keep back the big tear glittering beneath his eyelid.

What courage was not necessary in order to refrain from calming with a kiss the storm on the point of bursting, from consoling the little swollen heart, from drying the tear that was overflowing and about to become a flood.

Paternal love is no trifle; it has its follies and weaknesses, it is puerile and sublime, it can neither be analyzed nor explained, it is simply felt, and I yielded myself to it with delight.

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Let the papa without weakness cast the first stone at me; the mammas will avenge me.

Remember that this little laced boot, with a hole in the toe, reminded me of his plump little foot, and that a thousand recollections were connected with that dear trifle.

I recalled him, dear child, as when I cut his toe nails, wriggling about, pulling at my beard, and laughing in spite of himself, for he was ticklish.

I recalled him as when of an evening in front of a good fire, I pulled off his little socks. What a treat.

I would say “one, two.” And he, clad in his long nightgown, his hands lost in the sleeves, would wait with glittering eyes, and ready to break into a fit of laughter for the “three.”

At last after a thousand delays, a thousand little teasings that excited his impatience and allowed me to snatch five or six kisses, I said “three.”

The sock flew away. Then there was a wild joy; he would throw himself back on my arm, waving his bare legs in the air. From his open mouth, in which two rows of shining little pearls could be distinguished, welled forth a burst of ringing laughter.

His mother, who, however, laughed too, would say the next minute, “Come, baby, come, my little angel, you will get cold . . . But leave off. . . Will you have done, you little demon?”

She wanted to scold, but she could not be serious at the sight of his fair-haired head, and flushed, smiling, happy face, thrown back on my knee.

She would look at me, and say:

“He is unbearable. Good gracious! what a child.”

But I understood that this meant:

“Look how handsome, sturdy and healthy he is, our baby, our little man, our son.”

And indeed he was adorable; at least I thought so.

I had the wisdom—I can say it now that my hair is white—not to let one of those happy moments pass without amply profiting by it, and really I did well. Pity the fathers who do not know how to be papas as often as possible, who do not know how to roll on the carpet, play at being a horse, pretend to be the great wolf, undress their baby, imitate the barking of the dog, and the roar of the lion, bite whole mouthfuls without hurting, and hide behind armchairs so as to let themselves be seen.



Pity sincerely these unfortunates. It is not only pleasant child's play that they neglect, but true pleasure, delightful enjoyment, the scraps of that happiness which is greatly calumniated and accused of not existing because we expect it to fall from heaven in a solid mass when it lies at our feet in fine powder. Let us pick up the fragments, and not grumble too much; every day brings us with its bread its ration of happiness.

Let us walk slowly and look down on the ground, searching around us and seeking in the corners; it is there that Providence has its hiding-places.

I have always laughed at those people who rush through life at full speed, with dilated nostrils, uneasy eyes, and glance rivetted on the horizon. It seems as though the present scorched their feet, and when you say to them, "Stop a moment, alight, take a glass of this good old wine, let us chat a little, laugh a little, kiss your child."

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"Impossible," they reply; "I am expected over there. There I shall converse, there I shall drink delicious wine, there I shall give expansion to paternal love, there I shall be happy!"

And when they do get "there," breathless and tired out, and claim the price of their fatigue, the present, laughing behind its spectacles, says, "Monsieur, the bank is closed."

The future promises, it is the present that pays, and one should have a good understanding with the one that keeps the keys of the safe.

Why fancy that you are a dupe of Providence?

Do you think that Providence has the time to serve up to each of you perfect happiness, already dressed on a golden plate, and to play music during your repast into the bargain? Yet that is what a great many people would like.

We must be reasonable, tuck up our sleeves and look after our cooking ourselves, and not insist that heaven should put itself out of the way to skim our soup.

I used to muse on all this of an evening when my baby was in my arms, and his moist, regular breathing fanned my hand. I thought of the happy moments he had already given me, and was grateful to him for them.

"How easy it is," I said to myself, "to be happy, and what a singular fancy that is of going as far as China in quest of amusement."

My wife was of my opinion, and we would sit for hours by the fire talking of what we felt.

"You, do you see, dear? love otherwise than I do," she often said to me. "Papás calculate more. Their love requires a return. They do not really love their child till the day on which their self-esteem as its father is flattered. There is something of ownership in it. You can analyze paternal love, discover its causes, say 'I love my child because he is so and so, or so and so.' With the mother such analysis is impossible, she does not love her child because he is handsome or ugly, because he does or does not resemble her, has or has not her tastes. She loves him because she can not help it, it is a necessity. Maternal love is an innate sentiment in woman. Paternal love is, in man, the result of circumstances. In her love is an instinct, in him a calculation, of which, it is true, he is unconscious, but, in short, it is the outcome of several other feelings."

"That is all very fine; go on," I said. "We have neither heart nor bowels, we are fearful savages. What you say is monstrous." And I stirred the logs furiously with the tongs.

Yet my wife was right, I acknowledged to myself. When a child comes into the world the affection of the father is not to be compared to that of the mother. With her it is love already. It seems that she has known him for a long time, her pretty darling. At his first cry it might be said that she recognized him. She seems to say, "It is he." She takes him without the slightest embarrassment, her movements are natural, she shows no awkwardness,

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and in her two twining arms the baby finds a place to fit him, and falls asleep contentedly in the nest created for him. It would be thought that woman serves a mysterious apprenticeship to maternity. Man, on the other hand, is greatly troubled by the birth of a child. The first wail of the little creature stirs him, but in this emotion there is more astonishment than love. His affection is not yet born. His heart requires to reflect and to become accustomed to these fondnesses so new to him.

There is an apprenticeship to be served to the business of a father. There is none to that of a mother.

If the father is clumsy morally in his love for his firstborn, it must be acknowledged that he is so physically in the manifestation of his fondness.

It is only tremblingly, and with contortions and efforts, that he lifts the slight burden. He is afraid of smashing the youngster, who knows this, and thence bawls with all the force of his lungs. He expands more strength, poor man, in lifting up his child than he would in bursting a door open. If he kisses him, his beard pricks him; if he touches him, his big fingers cause him some disaster. He has the air of a bear threading a needle.

And yet it must be won, the affection of this poor father, who, at the outset, meets nothing but misadventures; he must be captivated, captured, made to have a taste for the business, and not be left too long to play the part of a recruit.

Nature has provided for it, and the father rises to the rank of corporal the day the baby lisps his first syllables.

It is very sweet, the first lisping utterance of a child, and admirably chosen to move—the “pa-pa” the little creature first murmurs. It is strange that the first word of a child should express precisely the deepest and tenderest sentiment of all?

Is it not touching to see that the little creature finds of himself the word that is sure to touch him of whom he stands most in need; the word that means, “I am yours, love me, give me a place in your heart, open your arms to me; you see I do not know much as yet, I have only just arrived, but, already, I think of you, I am one of the family, I shall eat at your table, and bear your name, pa-pa, pa-pa.”

He has discovered at once the most delicate of flatteries, the sweetest of caresses. He enters on life by a master stroke.

Ah! the dear little love! “Pa-pa, pa-pa,” I still hear his faint, hesitating voice, I can still see his two coral lips open and close. We were all in a circle around him, kneeling down to be on a level with him. They kept saying to him, “Say it again, dear, say it

again. Where is papa?" And he, amused by all these people about him, stretched out his arms, and turned his eyes toward me.

I kissed him heartily, and felt that two big tears hindered me from speaking.

From that moment I was a papa in earnest. I was christened.



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CHAPTER XXVIII

BABIES AND PAPAS

When the baby reaches three or four years of age, when his sex shows itself in his actions, his tastes and his eyes, when he smashes his wooden horses, cuts open his drums, blows trumpets, breaks the castors off the furniture, and evinces a decided hostility to crockery; in a word, when he is a man, it is then that the affection of a father for his son becomes love. He feels himself invaded by a need of a special fondness, of which the sweetest recollections of his past life can give no idea. A deep sentiment envelopes his heart, the countless roots of which sink into it in all directions. Defects or qualities penetrate and feed on this sentiment. Thus, we find in paternal love all the weaknesses and all the greatnesses of humanity. Vanity, abnegation, pride, and disinterestedness are united together, and man in his entirety appears in the papa.

It is on the day which the child becomes a mirror in which you recognize your features, that the heart is moved and awakens. Existence becomes duplicated, you are no longer one, but one and a half; you feel your importance increase, and, in the future of the little creature who belongs to you, you reconstruct your own past; you resuscitate, and are born again in him. You say to yourself: "I will spare him such and such a vexation which I had to suffer, I will clear from his path such and such a stone over which I stumbled, I will make him happy, and he shall owe all to me; he shall be, thanks to me, full of talents and attractions." You give him, in advance, all that you did not get yourself, and in his future arrange laurels for a little crown for your own brows.

Human weakness, no doubt; but what matter, provided the sentiment that gives birth to this weakness is the strongest and purest of all? What matter if a limpid stream springs up between two paving stones? Are we to be blamed for being generous out of egotism, and for devoting ourselves to others for reasons of personal enjoyment?

Thus, in the father, vanity is the leading string. Say to any father: "Good heavens! how like you he is!" The poor man may hesitate at saying yes, but I defy him not to smile. He will say, "Perhaps . . . Do you think so? . . . Well, perhaps so, side face."

And do not you be mistaken; if he does so, it is that you may reply in astonishment: "Why, the child is your very image."

He is pleased, and that is easily explained; for is not this likeness a visible tie between him and his work? Is it not his signature, his trade-mark, his title-deed, and, as it were, the sanction of his rights?

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To this physical resemblance there soon succeeds a moral likeness, charming in quite another way. You are moved to tears when you recognize the first efforts of this little intelligence to grasp your ideas. Without check or examination it accepts and feeds on them. By degrees the child shares your tastes, your habits, your ways. He assumes a deep voice to be like papa, asks for your braces, sighs before your boots, and sits down with admiration on your hat. He protects his mamma when he goes out with her, and scolds the dog, although he is very much afraid of him; all to be like papa. Have you caught him at meals with his large observant eyes fixed on you, studying your face with open mouth and spoon in hand, and imitating his model with an expression of astonishment and respect. Listen to his long gossips, wandering as his little brain; does he not say:

“When I am big like papa I shall have a moustache and a stick like him, and I shall not be afraid in the dark, because it is silly to be afraid in the dark when you are big, and I shall say ‘damn it,’ for I shall then be grown up.”

“Baby, what did you say, sir?”

“I said just as papa does.”

What would you? He is a faithful mirror. You are for him an ideal, a model, the type of all that is great and strong, handsome and intelligent.

Often he makes mistakes, the little dear, but his error is all the more delicious in its sincerity, and you feel all the more unworthy of such frank admiration. You console yourself for your own imperfections in reflecting that he is not conscious of them.

The defects of children are almost always harrowed from their father; they are the consequences of a too literal copy. Provide, then, against them. Yes, no doubt, but I ask you what strength of mind is not needed by a poor man to undeceive his baby, to destroy, with a word, his innocent confidence, by saying to him: “My child, I am not perfect, and I have faults to be avoided?”

This species of devotion on the part of the baby for his father reminds me of the charming remark of one of my little friends. Crossing the road, the little fellow caught sight of a policeman. He examined him with respect, and then turning to me, after a moment’s reflection, said, with an air of conviction: “Papa is stronger than all the policemen, isn’t he?”

If I had answered “No,” our intimacy would have been broken off short.

Was it not charming? One can truly say, “Like baby, like papa.” Our life is the threshold of his. It is with our eyes that he has first seen.

Profit, young fathers, by the first moments of candor on the part of your dear baby, seek to enter his heart when this little heart opens, and establish yourself in it so thoroughly, that at the moment when the child is able to judge you, he will love you too well to be severe or to cease loving. Win his, affection, it is worth the trouble.

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To be loved all your life by a being you love—that is the problem to be solved, and toward the solution of which all your efforts should be directed. To make yourself loved, is to store up treasures of happiness for the winter. Each year will take away a scrap of your life, contract the circle of interests and pleasures in which you live; your mind by degrees will lose its vigor, and ask for rest, and as you live less and less by the mind, you will live more and more by the heart. The affection of others which was only a pleasant whet will become a necessary food, and whatever you may have been, statesmen or artists, soldiers or bankers, when your heads are white, you will no longer be anything but fathers.

But filial love is not born all at once, nor is it necessary it should be. The voice of nature is a voice rather poetical than truthful. The affection of children is earned and deserved; it is a consequence, not a cause, and gratitude is its commencement. At any cost, therefore, your baby must be made grateful. Do not reckon that he will be grateful to you for your solicitude, your dreams for his future, the cost of his nursing, and the splendid dowry that you are amassing for him; such gratitude would require from his little brain too complicated a calculation, besides social ideas as yet unknown to him. He will not be thankful to you for the extreme fondness you have for him; do not be astonished at it, and do not cry out at his ingratitude. You must first make him understand your affection; he must appreciate and judge it before responding to it; he must know his notes before he can play tunes.

The little man's gratitude will at first be nothing but a simple, egotistical and natural calculation. If you have made him laugh, if you have amused him, he will want you to begin again, he will hold out his little arms to you, crying: "Do it again." And the recollection of the pleasure you have given him becoming impressed upon his mind, he will soon say to himself: "No one amuses me so well as papa; it is he who tosses me into the air, plays at hide-and-seek with me and tells me tales." So, by degrees, gratitude will be born in him, as thanks spring to the lips of him who is made happy.

Therefore, learn the art of amusing your child, imitate the crowing of the cock, and gambol on the carpet, answer his thousand impossible questions, which are the echo of his endless dreams, and let yourself be pulled by the beard to imitate a horse. All this is kindness, but also cleverness, and good King Henry IV did not belie his skilful policy by walking on all fours on his carpet with his children on his back.

In this way, no doubt, your paternal authority will lose something of its austere prestige, but will gain the deep and lasting influence that affection gives. Your baby will fear you less but will love you more. Where is the harm.

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Do not be afraid of anything; become his comrade, in order to have the right of remaining his friend. Hide your paternal superiority as the commissary of police does his sash. Ask with kindness for that which you might rightly insist upon having, and await everything from his heart if you have known how to touch it. Carefully avoid such ugly words as discipline, passive obedience and command; let his submission be gentle to him, and his obedience resemble kindness. Renounce the stupid pleasure of imposing your fancies upon him, and of giving orders to prove your infallibility.

Children have a keenness of judgment, and a delicacy of impression which would not be imagined, unless one has studied them. Justice and equity are easily born in their minds, for they possess, above all things, positive logic. Profit by all this. There are unjust and harsh words which remain graven on a child's heart, and which he remembers all his life. Reflect that, in your baby, there is a man whose affection will cheer your old age; therefore respect him so that he may respect you; and be sure that there is not a single seed sown in this little heart which will not sooner or later bear fruit.

But there are, you will say, unmanageable children, rebels from the cradle. Are you sure that the first word they heard in their lives has not been the cause of their evil propensities? Where there has been rebellion, there has been clumsy pressure; for I will not believe in natural vice. Among evil instincts there is always a good one, of which an arm can be made to combat the others. This requires, I know, extreme kindness, perfect tact, and unlimited confidence, but the reward is sweet. I think, therefore, in conclusion, that a father's first kiss, his first look, his first caresses, have an immense influence on a child's life. To love is a great deal. To know how to love is everything.

Even were one not a father, it is impossible to pass by the dear little ones without feeling touched, and without loving them. Muddy and ragged, or carefully decked out; running in the roadway and rolling in the dust, or playing at skipping rope in the gardens of the Tuileries; dabbling among the ducklings, or building hills of sand beside well-dressed mammas—babies are charming. In both classes there is the same grace, the same unembarrassed movements, the same comical seriousness, the same carelessness as to the effect created, in short, the same charm; the charm that is called childhood, which one can not understand without loving—which one finds just the same throughout nature, from the opening flower and the dawning day to the child entering upon life.

A baby is not an imperfect being, an unfinished sketch—he is a man. Watch him closely, follow every one of his movements; they will reveal to you a logical sequence of ideas, a marvellous power of imagination, such as will not again be found at any period of life. There is more real poetry in the brain of these dear loves than in twenty epics. They are surprised and unskilled, no doubt; but nothing equals the vigor of these minds, unexperienced, fresh, simple, sensible of the slightest impressions, which make their way through the midst of the unknown.

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What immense labor is gone through by them in a few months! To notice noises, classify them, understand that some of these sounds are words, and that these words are thoughts; to find out of themselves alone the meaning of everything, and distinguish the true from the false, the real from the imaginary; to correct, by observation, the errors of their too ardent imagination; to unravel a chaos, and during this gigantic task to render the tongue supple and strengthen the staggering little legs, in short, to become a man. If ever there was a curious and touching sight it is that of this little creature setting out upon the conquest of the world. As yet he knows neither doubt nor fear, and opens his heart fully. There is something of Don Quixote about a baby. He is as comic as the Knight, but he has also a sublime side.

Do not laugh too much at the hesitations, the countless gropings, the preposterous follies of this virgin mind, which a butterfly lifts to the clouds, to which grains of sand are mountains, which understands the twittering of birds, ascribes thoughts to flowers, and souls to dolls, which believes in far-off realms, where the trees are sugar, the fields chocolate, and the rivers syrup, for which Punch and Mother Hubbard are real and powerful individuals, a mind which peoples silence and vivifies night. Do not laugh at his love; his life is a dream, and his mistakes poetry.

This touching poetry which you find in the infancy of man you also find in the infancy of nations. It is the same. In both cases there is the same necessity of idealization, the same tendency to personify the unknown. And it may be said that between Punch and Jupiter, Mother Hubbard and Venus, there is only a hair's breadth.

CHAPTER XXIX

HIS FIRST BREECHES

The great desire in a child is to become a man. But the first symptom of virility, the first serious step taken in life, is marked by the assumption of breeches.

This first breeching is an event that papa desires and mamma dreads. It seems to the mother that it is the beginning of her being forsaken. She looks with tearful eyes at the petticoat laid aside for ever, and murmurs to herself, "Infancy is over then? My part will soon become a small one. He will have fresh tastes, new wishes; he is no longer only myself, his personality is asserting itself; he is some one's boy."

The father, on the contrary, is delighted. He laughs in his moustache to see the little arching calves peeping out beneath the trousers; he feels the little body, the outline of which can be clearly made out under the new garment, and says to himself; "How well he is put together, the rascal. He will have broad shoulders and strong loins like myself. How firmly his little feet tread the ground." Papa would like to see him in jackboots; for a trifle he would buy him spurs. He begins to see himself in this little one

sprung from him; he looks at him in a fresh light, and, for the first time, he finds a great charm in calling him “my boy.”

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As to the baby, he is intoxicated, proud, triumphant, although somewhat embarrassed as to his arms and legs, and, be it said, without any wish to offend him, greatly resembling those little poodles we see freshly shaven on the approach of summer. What greatly disturbed the poor little fellow is past. How many men of position are there who do not experience similar inconvenience. He knows very well that breeches, like nobility, render certain things incumbent on their possessor, that he must now assume new ways, new gestures, a new tone of voice; he begins to scan out of the corner of his eye the movements of his papa, who is by no means ill pleased at this: he clumsily essays a masculine gesture or two; and this struggle between his past and his present gives him for some time the most comical air in the world. His petticoats haunt him, and really he is angry that it is so.

Dear first pair of breeches! I love you, because you are a faithful friend, and I encounter at every step in life you and your train of sweet sensations. Are you not the living image of the latest illusion caressed by our vanity? You, young officer, who still measure your moustaches in the glass, and who have just assumed for the first time the epaulette and the gold belt, how did you feel when you went downstairs and heard the scabbard of your sabre go clink-clank on the steps, when with your cap on one side and your arm akimbo you found yourself in the street, and, an irresistible impulse urging you on, you gazed at your figure reflected in the chemist's bottles? Will you dare to say that you did not halt before those bottles? First pair of breeches, lieutenant.

You will find them again, these breeches, when you are promoted to be Captain and are decorated. And later on, when, an old veteran with a gray moustache, you take a fair companion to rejuvenate you, you will again put them on; but this time the dear creature will help you to wear them.

And the day when you will no longer have anything more to do with them, alas! that day you will be very low, for one's whole life is wrapped up in this precious garment. Existence is nothing more than putting on our first pair of breeches, taking them off, putting them on again, and dying with eyes fixed on them.

Is it the truth that most of our joys have no more serious origin than those of children? Are we then so simple? Ah! yes, my dear sir, we are simple to this degree, that we do not think we are. We never quite get rid of our swaddling clothes; do you see, there is always a little bit sticking out? There is a baby in every one of us, or, rather, we are only babies grown big.

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See the young barrister walking up and down the lobby of the courts. He is freshly shaven: in the folds of his new gown he hides a pile of documents, and on his head, in which a world of thought is stirring, is a fine advocate's coif, which he bought yesterday, and which this morning he coquettishly crushed in with a blow from his fist before putting it on. This young fellow is happy; amid the general din he can distinguish the echo of his own footsteps, and the ring of his bootheels sounds to him like the great bell of Notre Dame. In a few minutes he will find an excuse for descending the great staircase, and crossing the courtyard in costume. You may be sure that he will not disrobe except to go to dinner. What joy in these five yards of black stuff; what happiness in this ugly bit of cloth stretched over stiff cardboard!

First pair of breeches—I think I recognize you.

And you, Madame, with what happiness do you renew each season the enjoyment caused by new clothes? Do not say, I beg of you, that such enjoyments are secondary ones, for their influence is positive upon your nature and your character. Why, I ask you, did you find so much captivating logic, so much persuasive eloquence, in the sermon of Father Paul? Why did you weep on quitting the church, and embrace your husband as soon as you got home? You know better than I do, Madame, that it was because on that day you had put on for the first time that little yellow bonnet, which is a gem, I acknowledge, and which makes you look twice as pretty. These impressions can scarcely be explained, but they are invincible. There may be a trifle of childishness in it all, you will admit, but it is a childishness that can not be got rid of.

As a proof of it, the other day, going to St. Thomas's to hear Father Nicholas, who is one of our shining lights, you experienced totally different sentiments; a general feeling of discontent and doubt and nervous irritability at every sentence of the preacher. Your soul did not soar heavenward with the same unreserved confidence; you left St. Thomas's with your head hot and your feet cold; and you so far forgot yourself as to say, as you got into your carriage, that Father Nicholas was a Gallican devoid of eloquence. Your coachman heard it. And, finally, on reaching home you thought your drawing-room too small and your husband growing too fat. Why, I again ask you, this string of vexatious impressions? If you remember rightly, dear Madame, you wore for the first time the day before yesterday that horrible little violet bonnet, which is such a disgusting failure. First pair of breeches, dear Madame.



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Would you like a final example? Observe your husband. Yesterday he went out in a bad temper—he had breakfasted badly—and lo! in the evening, at a quarter to seven, he came home from the Chamber joyful and well-pleased, a smile on his lips, and good-humor in his eye. He kissed you on the forehead with a certain unconstraint, threw a number of pamphlets and papers with an easy gesture on the sidetable, sat down to table, found the soup delicious, and ate joyously. “What is the matter with my husband?” you asked yourself . . . I will explain. Your husband spoke yesterday for the first time in the building, you know. He said—the sitting was a noisy one, the Left were threshing out some infernal questions—he said, during the height of the uproar, and rapping with his paper-knife on his desk: “But we can not hear!” And as these words were received on all sides with universal approbation and cries of “Hear, hear!” he gave his thoughts a more parliamentary expression by adding: “The voice of the honorable gentleman who is speaking does not reach us.” It was not much certainly, and the amendment may have been carried all the same, but after all it was a step; a triumph, to tell the truth, since your husband has from day to day put off the delivery of his maiden speech. Behold a happy deputy, a deputy who has just—put on his first pair of breeches.

What matter whether the reason be a serious or a futile one, if your blood flows faster, if you feel happier, if you are proud of yourself? To win a great victory or put on a new bonnet, what matters it if this new bonnet gives you the same joy as a laurel crown?

Therefore do not laugh too much at baby if his first pair of breeches intoxicates him, if, when he wears them, he thinks his shadow longer and the trees less high. He is beginning his career as a man, dear child, nothing more.

How many things have not people been proud of since the beginning of the world? They were proud of their noses under Francis the First, of their perukes under Louis XIV, and later on of their appetites and stoutness. A man is proud of his wife, his idleness, his wit, his stupidity, the beard on his chin, the cravat round his neck, the hump on his back.

CHAPTER XXX

COUNTRY CHILDREN

I love the baby that runs about under the trees of the Tuileries; I love the pretty little fair-haired girls with nice white stockings and unmanageable crinolines. I like to watch the tiny damsels decked out like reliquaries, and already affecting coquettish and lackadaisical ways. It seems to me that in each of them I can see thousands of charming faults already peeping forth. But all these miniature men and women, exchanging postage stamps and chattering of dress, have something of the effect of adorable monstrosities on me.

I like them as I like a bunch of grapes in February, or a dish of green peas in December.

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In the babies' kingdom, my friend, my favorite is the country baby, running about in the dust on the highway barefoot and ragged, and searching for black birds' and chaffinches' nests on the outskirts of the woods. I love his great black wondering eye, which watches you fixedly from between two locks of un combed hair, his firm flesh bronzed by the sun, his swarthy forehead, hidden by his hair, his smudged face and his picturesque breeches kept from falling off by the paternal braces fastened to a metal button, the gift of a gendarme.

Ah! what fine breeches; not very long in the legs, but, then, what room everywhere else! He could hide away entirely in this immense space which allows a shirt-tail, escaping through a slit, to wave like a flag. These breeches preserve a remembrance of all the garments of the family; here is a piece of maternal petticoat, here a fragment of yellow waistcoat, here a scrap of blue handkerchief; the whole sewn with a thread that presents the twofold advantage of being seen from a distance, and of not breaking.

But under these patched clothes you can make out a sturdy little figure; and, besides, what matters the clothes? Country babies are not coquettish; and when the coach comes down the hill with jingling bells and they rush after it, stumbling over their neighbors, tumbling with them in the dust, and rolling into the ditches, what would all these dear little gamins do in silk stockings?

I love them thus because they are wild, taking alarm, and fleeing away at your approach like the young rabbits you surprise in the morning playing among the wild thyme. You must have recourse to a thousand subterfuges in order to triumph over their alarm and gain their confidence. But if at length, thanks to your prudence, you find yourself in their company, at the outset play ceases, shouts and noise die away; the little group remain motionless, scratching their heads, and all their uneasy eyes look fixedly at you. This is the difficult moment.

A sharp word, a stern gesture, may cause an eternal misunderstanding with them, just as a kind remark, a smile, a caress will soon accomplish their conquest. And this conquest is worth the trouble, believe me.

One of my chief methods of winning them was as follows: I used to take my watch out of my pocket and look at it attentively. Then I would see my little people stretch their necks, open their eyes, and come a step nearer; and it would often happen that the chickens, ducklings, and geese, which were loitering close by in the grass, imitated their comrades and drew near too. I then would put my watch to my ear and smile like a man having a secret whispered to him. In presence of this prodigy my youngsters could no longer restrain themselves, and would exchange among themselves those keen, simple, timid, mocking looks, which must have been seen to be understood. They advanced this time in earnest, and if I offered to let the boldest listen, by holding out my watch to him, he would draw back alarmed, although smiling, while the band would

break into an outburst of joy; the ducklings flapping their wings, the white geese cackling, and the chickens going chk, chk. The game was won.

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How many times have I not played this little farce, seated under a willow on the banks of my little stream, which ripples over the white stones, while the reeds bend tremblingly. The children would crowd round me to hear the watch, and soon questions broke forth in chorus to an accompaniment of laughter. They inspected my gaiters, rummaged in my pockets and leant against my knees. The ducklings glided under my feet, and the big geese tickled my back.

How enjoyable it is not to alarm creatures that tremble at everything. I would not move for fear of interrupting their joy, and was like a child who is building a house of cards and who has got to the third story. But I marked all these happy little faces standing out against the blue sky; I watched the rays of the sun stealing into the tangles of their fair hair, or spreading in a patch of gold on their little brown necks; I followed their gestures full of awkwardness and grace; I sat down on the grass to be the nearer to them; and if an unfortunate chicken came to grief, between two daisies, I quickly stretched out my arm and replaced it on its legs.

I assure you that they were all grateful. If one loves these little people at all, there is one thing that strikes you when you watch them closely. Ducklings dabbling along the edge of the water or turning head over heels in their feeding trough, young shoots thrusting forth their tender little leaves above ground, little chickens running along before their mother hen, or little men staggering among the grass—all these little creatures resemble one another. They are the babies of the great mother Nature; they have common laws, a common physiognomy; they have something inexplicable about them which is at once comic and graceful, awkward and tender, and which makes them loved at once; they are relations, friends, comrades, under the same flag. This pink and white flag, let us salute it as it passes, old graybeards that we are. It is blessed, and is called childhood.

All babies are round, yielding, weak, timid, and soft to the touch as a handful of wadding. Protected by cushions of good rosy flesh or by a coating of soft down, they go rolling, staggering, dragging along their little unaccustomed feet, shaking in the air their plump hands or featherless wing. See them stretched haphazard in the sun without distinction of species, swelling themselves with milk or meal, and dare to say that they are not alike. Who knows whether all these children of nature have not a common point of departure, if they are not brothers of the same origin?

Since men with green spectacles have existed, they have amused themselves with ticketing the creatures of this world. These latter are arranged, divided into categories and classified, as though by a careful apothecary who wants everything about him in order. It is no slight matter to stow away each one in the drawer that suits him, and I have heard that certain subjects still remain on the counter owing to their belonging to two show-cases at once.

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And what proves to me, indeed, that these cases exist? What is there to assure me that the whole world is not one family, the members of which only differ by trifles which we are pleased to regard as everything?

Have you fully established the fact of these drawers and compartments? Have you seen the bars of these imaginary cages in which you imprison kingdoms and species? Are there not infinite varieties which escape your analysis, and are, as it were, the unknown links uniting all the particles of the animated world? Why say, "For these eternity, for those annihilation?"

Why say, "This is the slave, that is the sovereign?" Strange boldness for men who are ignorant of almost everything!

Man, animal or plant, the creature vibrates, suffers or enjoys—exists and encloses in itself the trace of the same mystery. What assures me that this mystery, which is everywhere the same, is not the sign of a similar relationship, is not the sign of a great law of which we are ignorant?

I am dreaming, you will say. And what does science do herself when she reaches that supreme point at which magnifying glasses become obscure and compasses powerless? It dreams, too; it supposes. Let us, too, suppose that the tree is a man, rough skinned dreamy and silent, who loves, too, after his fashion and vibrates to his very roots when some evening a warm breeze, laden with the scents of the plain, blows through his green locks and overwhelms him with kisses. No, I do not accept the hypothesis of a world made for us. Childish pride, which would be ridiculous did not its very simplicity lend it something poetic, alone inspires it. Man is but one of the links of an immense chain, of the two ends of which we are ignorant. [See Mark Twain's essay: 'What is Man.' D.W.]

Is it not consoling to fancy that we are not an isolated power to which the remainder of the world serves as a pedestal, that one is not a licensed destroyer, a poor, fragile tyrant, whom arbitrary decrees protect, but a necessary note of an infinite harmony? To fancy that the law of life is the same in the immensity of space and irradiates worlds as it irradiates cities and as it irradiates ant-hills. To fancy that each vibration in ourselves is the echo of another vibration. To fancy a sole principle, a primordial axiom, to think the universe envelops us as a mother clasps her child in her two arms; and say to one's self, "I belong to it and it to me; it would cease to be without me. I should not exist without it." To see, in short, only the divine unity of laws, which could not be nonexistent, where others have only seen a ruling fancy or an individual caprice.

It is a dream. Perhaps so, but I have often dreamed it when watching the village children rolling on the fresh grass among the ducklings.

CHAPTER XXXI

AUTUMN

Do you know the autumn, dear reader, autumn away in the country with its squalls, its long gusts, its yellow leaves whirling in the distance, its sodden paths, its fine sunsets, pale as an invalid's smile, its pools of water in the roadway; do you know all these? If you have seen all these they are certainly not indifferent to you. One either detests or else loves them.

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I am of the number of those who love them, and I would give two summers for a single autumn. I adore the big blazing fires; I like to take refuge in the chimney corner with my dog between my wet gaiters. I like to watch the tall flames licking the old ironwork and lighting up the black depths. You hear the wind whistling in the stable, the great door creak, the dog pull at his chain and howl, and, despite the noise of the forest trees which are groaning and bending close by, you can make out the lugubrious cawings of a flock of rooks struggling against the storm. The rain beats against the little panes; and, stretching your legs toward the fire, you think of those without. You think of the sailors, of the old doctor driving his little cabriolet, the hood of which sways to and fro as the wheels sink into the ruts, and Cocotte neighs in the teeth of the wind. You think of the two gendarmes, with the rain streaming from their cocked hats; you see them, chilled and soaked, making their way along the path among the vineyards, bent almost double in the saddle, their horses almost covered with their long blue cloaks. You think of the belated sportsman hastening across the heath, pursued by the wind like a criminal by justice, and whistling to his dog, poor beast, who is splashing through the marshland. Unfortunate doctor, unfortunate gendarmes, unfortunate sportsman!

And all at once the door opens and Baby rushes in exclaiming: "Papa, dinner is ready." Poor doctor! poor gendarmes!

"What is there for dinner?"

The cloth was as white as snow in December, the plate glittered in the lamplight, the steam from the soup rose up under the lamp-shade, veiling the flame and spreading an appetizing smell of cabbage. Poor doctor! poor gendarmes!

The doors were well closed, the curtains carefully drawn. Baby hoisted himself on to his tall chair and stretched out his neck for his napkin to be tied round it, exclaiming at the same time with his hands in the air: "Nice cabbage soup." And, smiling to myself, I said: "The youngster has all my tastes."

Mamma soon came, and cheerfully pulling off her tight gloves: "There, sir, I think, is something that you are very fond of," she said to me.

It was a pheasant day, and instinctively I turned round a little to catch a glimpse on the sideboard of a dusty bottle of my old Chambertin. Pheasant and Chambertin! Providence created them for one another and my wife has never separated them.

"Ah! my children, how comfortable you are here," said I, and every one burst out laughing. Poor gendarmes! poor doctor!

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Yes, yes, I am very fond of the autumn, and my darling boy liked it as well as I did, not only on account of the pleasure there is in gathering round a fine large fire, but also on account of the squalls themselves, the wind and the dead leaves. There is a charm in braving them. How many times we have both gone out for a walk through the country despite cold and threatening clouds. We were wrapped up and shod with thick boots; I took his hand and we started off at haphazard. He was five years old then and trotted along like a little man. Heavens! it is five-and-twenty years ago. We went up the narrow lane strewn with damp black leaves; the tall gray poplars stripped of their foliage allowed a view of the horizon, and we could see in the distance, under a violet sky streaked with cold and yellowish bands, the low thatched roofs and the red chimneys from which issued little bluish clouds blown away by the wind. Baby jumped for joy, holding with his hand his hat which threatened to fly off, and looking at me with eyes glittering through tears brought into them by the breeze. His cheeks were red with cold, and quite at the tip of his nose hung ready to drop a small transparent pearl. But he was happy, and we skirted the wet meadows overflowed by the swollen river. No more reeds, no more water lilies, no more flowers on the banks. Some cows, up to mid-leg in damp herbage, were grazing quietly.

At the bottom of a ditch, near a big willow trunk, two little girls were huddled together under a big cloak wrapped about them. They were watching their cows, their half bare feet in split wooden shoes and their two little chilled faces under the large hood. From time to time large puddles of water in which the pale sky was reflected barred the way, and we remained for a moment beside these miniature lakes, rippling beneath the north wind, to see the leaves float on them. They were the last. We watched them detach themselves from the tops of the tall trees, whirl through the air and settle in the puddles. I took my little boy in my arms and we went through them as we could. At the boundaries of the brown and stubble fields was an overturned plough or an abandoned harrow. The stripped vines were level with the ground, and their damp and knotty stakes were gathered in large piles.

I remember that one day in one of these autumnal walks, as we gained the top of the hill by a broken road which skirts the heath and leads to the old bridge, the wind suddenly began to blow furiously. My darling, overwhelmed by it, caught hold of my leg and sheltered himself in the skirt of my coat. My dog, for his part, stiffening his four legs, with his tail between the hind ones and his ears waving in the wind, looked up at me too. I turned, the horizon was as gloomy as the interior of a church. Huge black clouds were sweeping toward us, and the trees were bending and groaning on every side under the torrents of rain driven before the squall.

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I only had time to catch up my little man, who was crying with fright, and to run and squeeze myself against a hedge which was somewhat protected by the old willows. I opened my umbrella, crouched down behind it, and, unbuttoning my big coat, stuffed Baby inside. He clung closely to me. My dog placed himself between my legs, and Baby, thus sheltered by his two friends, began to smile from the depths of his hiding-place. I looked at him and said:

“Well, little man, are you all right?”

“Yes, dear papa.”

I felt his two arms clasp round my waist—I was much thinner than I am now—and I saw that he was grateful to me for acting as a roof to him. Through the opening he stretched out his little lips and I bent mine down.

“Is it still raining outside, papa?”

“It will soon be over.”

“Already, I am so comfortable inside you.”

How all this stays in your heart. It is perhaps silly to relate these little joys, but how sweet it is to recall them.

We reached home as muddy as two water-dogs and we were well scolded. But when evening had come and Baby was in bed and I went to kiss him and tickle him a little, as was our custom, he put his two little arms round my neck and whispered: “When it rains we will go again, eh?”

CHAPTER XXXII

HE WOULD HAVE BEEN FORTY NOW

When you have seen your child born, have watched his first steps in life, have noted him smile and weep, have heard him call you papa as he stretches out his little arms to you, you think that you have become acquainted with all the joys of paternity, and, as though satiated with these daily joys that are under your hand, you already begin to picture those of the morrow. You rush ahead, and explore the future; you are impatient, and gulp down present happiness in long draughts, instead of tasting it drop by drop. But Baby's illness suffices to restore you to reason.

To realize the strength of the ties that bind you to him, it is necessary to have feared to see them broken; to know that a river is deep, you must have been on the point of drowning in it.

Recall the morning when, on drawing aside the curtain of his bed, you saw on the pillow his little face, pale and thin. His sunken eyes, surrounded by a bluish circle, were half closed. You met his glance, which seemed to come through a veil; he saw you, without smiling at you. You said, "Good morning," and he did not answer. His face only expressed dejection and weakness, it was no longer that of your child. He gave a kind of sigh, and his heavy eyelids drooped. You took his hands, elongated, transparent, and with colorless nails; they were warm and moist. You kissed them, those poor little hands, but there was no responsive thrill to the contact of your lips. Then you turned round, and saw your wife weeping behind you. It was at that moment when you felt yourself shudder from

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head to foot, and that the idea of a possible woe seized on you, never more to leave you. Every moment you kept going back to the bed and raising the curtains again, hoping perhaps that you had not seen aright, or that a miracle had taken place; but you withdrew quickly, with a lump in your throat. And yet you strove to smile, to make him smile himself; you sought to arouse in him the wish for something, but in vain; he remained motionless, exhausted, not even turning round, indifferent to all you said, to everything, even yourself.

And what is all that is needed to strike down this little creature, to reduce him to this pitch? Only a few hours. What, is that all that is needed to put an end to him? Five minutes. Perhaps.

You know that life hangs on a thread in this frail body, so little fitted to suffer. You feel that life is only a breath, and say to yourself: "Suppose this one is his last." A little while back he was complaining. Already he does so no longer. It seems as though someone is clasping him, bearing him away, tearing him from your arms. Then you draw near him, and clasp him to you almost involuntarily, as though to give him back some of your own life. His bed is damp with fever sweats, his lips are losing their color. The nostrils of his little nose, grown sharp and dry, rise and fall. His mouth remains wide open. It is that little rosy mouth which used to laugh so joyfully, those are the two lips that used to press themselves to yours, and . . . all the joys, the bursts of laughter, the follies, the endless chatter, all the bygone happiness, flock to your recollection at the sound of that gasping, breathing, while big hot tears fall slowly from your eyes. Poor wee man. Your hand seeks his little legs, and you dare not touch his chest, which you have kissed so often, for fear of encountering that ghastly leanness which you foresee, but the contact of which would make you break out in sobs. And then, at a certain moment, while the sunlight was flooding the room, you heard a deeper moan, resembling a cry. You darted forward; his face was contracted, and he looked toward you with eyes that no longer saw. And then all was calm, silent and motionless, while his hollow cheeks became yellow and transparent as the amber of his necklaces.

The recollection of that moment lasts for a lifetime in the hearts of those who have loved; and even in old age, when time has softened your grief, when other joys and other sorrows have filled your days, his dying bed still appears to you when sitting of an evening beside the fire. You see amid the sparkling flames the room of the lost child, the table with the drinks, the bottles, the arsenal of illness, the little garments, carefully folded, that waited for him so long, his toys abandoned in a corner. You even see the marks of his little fingers on the wall paper, and the zigzags he made with his pencil on the door; you see the corner scribbled over with lines and dates, in which he was measured every month, you see him playing, running, rushing up in a perspiration to throw himself into your arms, and, at the same time, you also see him fixing his glazing eyes on you, or motionless and cold under a white sheet, wet with holy water.

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Does not this recollection recur to you sometimes, Grandma, and do not you still shed a big tear as you say to yourself: "He would have been forty now?" Do we not know, dear old lady, whose heart still bleeds, that at the bottom of your wardrobe, behind your jewels, beside packets of yellow letters, the handwriting of which we will not guess at, there is a little museum of sacred relics—the last shoes in which he played about on the gravel the day he complained of being cold, the remains of some broken toys, a dried sprig of box, a little cap, his last, in a triple wrapper, and a thousand trifles that are a world to you, poor woman, that are the fragments of your broken heart?

The ties that unite children to parents are unloosed. Those which unite parents to children are broken. In one case, it is the past that is wiped out; in the other, the future that is rent away.

CHAPTER XXXIII

CONVALESCENCE

But, my patient reader, forget what have just said. Baby does not want to leave you, he does not want to die, poor little thing, and if you want a proof of it, watch him very closely; there, he smiles.

A very faint smile like those rays of sunlight that steal between two clouds at the close of a wet winter. You rather guess at than see this smile, but it is enough to warm your heart. The cloud begins to disperse, he sees you, he hears you, he knows that papa is there, your child is restored to you. His glance is already clearer. Call him softly. He wants to turn, but he can not yet, and for his sole answer his little hand, which is beginning to come to life again, moves and crumples the sheet. Just wait a little, poor impatient father, and tomorrow, on his awakening, he will say "Papa." You will see what good it will do you, this "Papa," faint as a mere breath, this first scarcely intelligible sign of a return to life. It will seem to you that your child has been born again a second time.

He will still suffer, he will have further crises, the storm does not become a calm all at once, but he will be able now to rest his head on your shoulder, nestle in your arms among the blankets; he will be able to complain, to ask help and relief of you with eye and voice; you will, in short, be reunited, and you will be conscious that he suffers less by suffering on your knees. You will hold his hand in yours, and if you seek to go away he will look at you and grasp your finger. How many things are expressed in this grasp. Dear sir, have you experienced it?

"Papa, do stay with me, you help to make me better; when I am alone I am afraid of the pain. Hold me tightly to you, and I shall not suffer so much."

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The more your protection is necessary to another the more you enjoy granting it. What is it then when this other is a second self, dearer than the first. With convalescence comes another childhood, so to speak. Fresh astonishments, fresh joys, fresh desires come one by one as health is restored. But what is most touching and delightful, is that delicate coaxing by the child who still suffers and clings to you, that abandonment of himself to you, that extreme weakness that gives him wholly over to you. At no period of his life has he so enjoyed your presence, has he taken refuge so willingly in your dressing-gown, has he listened more attentively to your stories and smiled more intelligently at your merriment. Is it true, as it seems to you, that he has never been more charming? Or is it simply that threatened danger has caused you to set a higher value on his caresses, and that you count over your treasures with all the more delight because you have been all but ruined?

But the little man is up again. Beat drums; sound trumpets; come out of your hiding-places, broken horses; stream in, bright sun; a song from you little birds. The little king comes to life again—long live the king! And you, your majesty, come and kiss your father.

What is singular is that this fearful crisis you have gone through becomes in some way sweet to you; you incessantly recur to it, you speak of it, you speak of it and cherish it in your mind; and, like the companions of Aeneas, you seek by the recollection of past dangers to increase the present joy.

“Do you remember,” you say, “the day when he was so ill? Do you remember his dim eyes, his poor; thin, little arm, and his pale lips? And that morning the doctor went away after clasping our hands?”

It is only Baby who does not remember anything. He only feels an overpowering wish to restore his strength, fill out his cheeks and recover his calves.

“Papa, are we going to have dinner soon, eh, papa?”

“Yes, it is getting dusk, wait a little.”

“But, papa, suppose we don’t wait?”

“In twenty minutes, you little glutton.”

“Twenty, is twenty a great many? If you eat twenty cutlets would it make you ill? But with potatoes, and jam, and soup, and—is it still twenty minutes?”

Then again: “Papa, when there is beef with sauce,” he has his mouth full of it, “red tomato sauce.”

“Yes, dear, well?”



“Well, a bullock is much bigger than what is on the dish; why don’t they bring the rest of the bullock? I could eat it all and then some bread and then some haricots, and then—”

He is insatiable when he has his napkin under his chin, and it is a happiness to see the pleasure he feels in working his jaws. His little eyes glisten, his cheeks grow red; what he puts away into his little stomach it is impossible to say, and so busy is he that he has scarcely time to laugh between two mouthfuls. Toward dessert his ardor slackens, his look becomes more and more languid, his fingers relax and his eyes close from time to time.

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"Mamma, I should like to go to bed," he says, rubbing his eyes. Baby is coming round.

CHAPTER XXXIV

FAMILY TIES

The exhilaration of success and the fever of life's struggle take a man away from his family, or cause him to live amid it as a stranger, and soon he no longer finds any attractions in the things which charmed him at the outset. But let ill luck come, let the cold wind blow rather strongly, and he falls back upon himself, he seeks near him something to support him in his weakness, a sentiment to replace his vanished dream, and he bends toward his child, he takes his wife's hand and presses it. He seems to invite these two to share his burden. Seeing tears in the eyes of those he loves, his own seem diminished to that extent. It would seem that moral suffering has the same effect as physical pain. The drowning wretch clutches at straws; in the same way, the man whose heart is breaking clasps his wife and children to him. He asks in turn for help, protection, and comfort, and it is a touching thing to see the strong shelter himself in the arms of the weak and recover courage in their kiss. Children have the instinct of all this; and the liveliest emotion they are capable of feeling is that which they experience on seeing their father weep.

Recall, dear reader, your most remote recollections, seek in that past which seems to you all the clearer the farther you are removed from it. Have you ever seen your father come home and sit down by the fire with a tear in his eye? Then you dared not draw near him at first, so deeply did you feel his grief. How unhappy he must be for his eyes to be wet. Then you felt that a tie attached you to this poor man, that his misfortune struck you too, that a part of it was yours, and that you were smitten because your father was. And no one understands better than the child this joint responsibility of the family to which he owes everything. You have felt all this; your heart has swollen as you stood silent in the corner, and sobs have broken forth as, without knowing why, you have held out your arms toward him. He has turned, he has understood all, he has not been able to restrain his grief any further, and you have remained clasped in one another's arms, father, mother, and child, without saying anything, but gazing at and understanding one another. Did you, however, know the cause of the poor man's grief?

Not at all.

This is why filial love and paternal love have been poetized, why the family is styled holy. It is because one finds therein the very source of that need of loving, helping and sustaining one another, which from time to time spreads over the whole of society, but in the shape of a weakened echo. It is only from time to time in history that we see a whole nation gather together, retire within itself and experience the same thrill.

A frightful convulsion is needed to make a million men hold out their hands to one another and understand one another at a glance; it needs a superhuman effort for the family to become the nation, and for the boundaries of the hearth to extend to the frontiers.

laws. A great deal has been said on this subject, and I do not wish to add to the voluminous documents in this lawsuit. Acknowledge frankly all you who have heard the cry of your new-born child and felt your heart tingle like a glass on the point

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of breaking, unless you are idiots, acknowledge that you said to yourselves: "I am in the right. Here, and here alone, lies man's part. I am entering on a path, beaten and worn, but straight; I shall cross the weary downs, but each step will bring me nearer the village spire. I am not wandering through life, I am marching on, I stir with my feet the dust in which my father has planted his. My child, on the same road, will find the traces of my footsteps, and, perhaps, on seeing that I have not faltered, will say: 'Let me act like my old father and not lose myself in the ploughed land.'"

If the word holy has still a meaning, despite the uses it has been put to, I do not see that a better use can be made of it than by placing it beside the word family.

They speak of progress, justice, general well-being, infallible policies, patriotism, devotion. I am for all these good things, but this bright horizon is summed up in these three words: "Love your neighbor," and this is precisely, in my opinion, the thing they forget to teach.

To love your neighbor is as simple as possible, but the mischief is that you do not meet with this very natural feeling. There are people who will show you the seed in the hollow of their hand, but even those who deal in this precious grain are the last to show you it in leaf.

Well, my dear reader, this little plant which should spring up like the poppies in the wheat, this plant which has never been seen growing higher than watercress, but which should overtop the oaks, this undiscoverable plant, I know where it grows.

It grows beside the domestic hearth, between the shovel and tongs; it is there that it perpetuates itself, and if it still exists, it is to the family that we owe it. I love pretty nearly all the philanthropists and saviours of mankind; but I only believe in those who have learned to love others by embracing their own children.

Mankind can not be remodelled to satisfy the wants of humanitarian theories; man is egotistical, and he loves, above all, those who are about him. This is the natural human sentiment, and it is this which must be enlarged, extended and cultivated. In a word, it is in family love that is comprised love of country and consequently of humanity. It is from fathers that citizens are made.

Man has not twenty prime movers, but only one in his heart; do not argue but profit by it.

Affection is catching. Love between three—father, mother, and child—when it is strong, soon requires space; it pushes back the walls of the house, and by degrees invites the neighbors. The important thing, then, is to give birth to this love between three; for it is

madness, I am afraid, to thrust the whole human species all at once on a man's heart. Such large mouthfuls are not to be swallowed at a gulp, nor without preparation.

This is why I have always thought that with the numerous sous given for the redemption of the little Chinese, we might in France cause the fire to sparkle on hearths where it sparkles no longer, make many eyes grow brighter round a tureen of smoking soup, warm chilled mothers, bring smiles to the pinched faces of children, and give pleasure and happiness to poor discouraged ones on their return home.

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What a number of hearty kisses you might have brought about with all these sous, and, in consequence, what a sprinkling with the watering-pot for the little plant you wot of.

“But then what is to become of the redemption of the little Chinese?”

We will think of this later; we must first know how to love our own before we are able to love those of others.

No doubt, this is brutal and egotistical, but you can not alter it; it is out of small faults that you build up great virtues. And, after all, do not grumble, this very vanity is the foundation stone of that great monument—at present still propped up by scaffolding—which is called Society.

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

Affection is catching
All babies are round, yielding, weak, timid, and soft
And I shall say 'damn it,' for I shall then be grown up
He Would Have Been Forty Now
How many things have not people been proud of
I am not wandering through life, I am marching on
I do not accept the hypothesis of a world made for us
I would give two summers for a single autumn
In his future arrange laurels for a little crown for your own
It (science) dreams, too; it supposes
Learned to love others by embracing their own children
Life is not so sweet for us to risk ourselves in it singlehanded
Man is but one of the links of an immense chain
Recollection of past dangers to increase the present joy
Respect him so that he may respect you
Shelter himself in the arms of the weak and recover courage
The future promises, it is the present that pays
The future that is rent away
The recollection of that moment lasts for a lifetime
Their love requires a return
Ties that unite children to parents are unloosed
Ties which unite parents to children are broken
To love is a great deal—To know how to love is everything
We are simple to this degree, that we do not think we are
When time has softened your grief

ETEXT editor's bookmarks for the entire monsieur, madame and Bebe:



A ripe husband, ready to fall from the tree
Affection is catching
All babies are round, yielding, weak, timid, and soft
And I shall say 'damn it,' for I shall then be grown up
Answer "No," but with a little kiss which means "Yes"
As regards love, intention and deed are the same
But she thinks she is affording you pleasure
Clumsily, blew his nose, to the great relief of his two arms
Do not seek too much
Emotion when one does not share it
First impression is based upon a number of trifles
He Would Have Been Forty Now
Hearty laughter which men affect to assist digestion

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How many things have not people been proud of
How rich we find ourselves when we rummage in old drawers
Husband who loves you and eats off the same plate is better
I would give two summers for a single autumn
I do not accept the hypothesis of a world made for us
I came here for that express purpose
I am not wandering through life, I am marching on
Ignorant of everything, undesirous of learning anything
In his future arrange laurels for a little crown for your own
It (science) dreams, too; it supposes
It is silly to blush under certain circumstances
Learned to love others by embracing their own children
Life is not so sweet for us to risk ourselves in it singlehanded
Love in marriage is, as a rule, too much at his ease
Man is but one of the links of an immense chain
Rather do not give—make yourself sought after
Reckon yourself happy if in your husband you find a lover
Recollection of past dangers to increase the present joy
Respect him so that he may respect you
Shelter himself in the arms of the weak and recover courage
Sometimes like to deck the future in the garments of the past
The heart requires gradual changes
The future that is rent away
The recollection of that moment lasts for a lifetime
The future promises, it is the present that pays
Their love requires a return
There are pious falsehoods which the Church excuses
Ties that unite children to parents are unloosed
Ties which unite parents to children are broken
To be able to smoke a cigar without being sick
To love is a great deal—To know how to love is everything
We are simple to this degree, that we do not think we are
When time has softened your grief
Why mankind has chosen to call marriage a man-trap